

Witness Statement: Nadia Elbouti

No. of statement: 1

Exhibits:

Date of statement: 10.07.18

GRENFELL TOWER PUBLIC INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF NADIA ELBOUTI

I, Nadia Elbouti, will say as follows:

1. This statement is my account of events that took place on 14th June 2017. I make this statement for the purposes of Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry. I wish to make a further statement as part of Phase 2 of the Inquiry.
2. This statement was made in Arabic and has been translated into English by a translator.

Background

3. I live at [REDACTED] Hurstway Walk, [REDACTED]. I moved to England in 2001. I am a council tenant and have lived in my property since 2005. The flat is a two bedroom split-level flat, on the third floor of the building. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

4. At the time of the fire I was working at a school as a dinner lady. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Community

5. We both have a lot of friends in the local area. There is a strong Moroccan community who we go to parties and gatherings with. We all know each other. All our neighbours are friendly and my daughter has always played out in the park with the other children. Before the Aldridge Academy was built there was a really good playground at the bottom of Grenfell Tower where all the local children went and played together. It was a great community.
6. I can see Grenfell Tower from my balcony and from the window in my living room. I believe that my balcony and living room looks onto the South and West side of the Tower.
7. Grenfell Tower is a big feature of our lives as the Walkways are all based around it. The Tower is very close to where we live. The communities in the Walkways and the Tower are very connected. The children who live in the Walkways and the Tower go to the same schools and play in the same places. There was a real community before the fire.
8. I knew lots of people who lived in the Tower and I have been into the Tower many times, for example to leave my daughter at her friend's house. I have been to parties for special occasions and also to offer my condolences when people have died, which is an important part of our community life.
9. I don't at this stage wish to talk about my experience of living in the Walkways and the council. I will wait until Phase 2 to do this.

14 June 2017

10. On the night of the fire, my daughter and I were both at home. As it was Ramadan, I was awake in the living room. My daughter had fallen asleep on the sofa and I was praying.
11. As I was praying, I heard a noise coming from outside which sounded like fizzing and crackling. Our living room opens out onto a balcony and I went onto the balcony to see what was going on. I could see a little bit of smoke coming from behind the Tower. I am not sure what time it was, but I think it

was about 1.30am as my daughter took a video shortly afterwards which has a time on it and it is timed at 1.38am.

12. At first I was not worried because there have been small fires in other blocks before and they have always been controlled and put out by firefighters, so I thought that the same thing would happen. For example there have been a number of small fires at Trellick Tower, which is nearby. About three weeks after the fire at Grenfell there was another fire at Trellick Tower but it did not spread. There has never been a serious fire in my block, but once our downstairs neighbour's boiler burst and caused a small fire. The fire brigade came but we did not have to leave the building. We have never been given information about what to do in case of fire or an emergency. Because of these experiences I did not imagine that the fire at Grenfell would become so serious.
13. I stayed out on the balcony for a couple of minutes watching the Tower. The fire seemed to be growing and I could see flames. I was very shocked to see this. I could not really believe what I was seeing. I still thought at this time that it would be brought under control but I was starting to realise that this was different to other fires which had happened in the past because the flames were spreading.
14. I woke up my daughter and told her there was a fire in Grenfell Tower. She came out onto the balcony with me, and started filming the Tower on her phone, which is the video I mentioned above. The fire was still small at that point compared to what it became later on, but we were worried about it by then as it seemed to be growing. It was shooting up the cladding in a straight line.
15. I do not speak English very well so my daughter called the fire brigade. They said that the fire had already been reported and that they were on their way.
16. My daughter's best friend, Mierna Choucair, lived in the Tower with her family on the 22nd floor. I was also good friends with her parents, Nadia and

Baseem. After calling the fire brigade, my daughter tried to call Mierna. She did not pick up the calls at first. She was probably asleep at this time.

17. My daughter kept trying to call her and eventually Mierna picked up her phone. Mierna told my daughter that the family were asleep. She said that they did not know what was happening. My daughter told her friend that there was a fire in Grenfell Tower and they should get out. Her friend said that she needed to go to the next door flat to help her grandmother who needed a stick to walk with. I knew that her grandmother needed a walking stick and that her little sister, Zaynab, had asthma, so I was concerned about how they would get downstairs.
18. My daughter was extremely distressed. She was worried about her friend. I did not know how to comfort her as I was also very scared about what was going to happen to them. We were watching the fire growing and it was clearly becoming extremely dangerous.
19. My daughter made another video on her phone at 1.43am and in the video she is crying because she is so scared for her friend. I could see that the fire was spreading across the building and it was starting to spread around the corner of the block. I did not think that the firefighters would be able to control the fire now. It was just spreading too much.
20. At about 1.55am my daughter and I decided to go down to the Tower to try to help people getting out or to find people we knew. We grabbed our jackets and ran out of the house and down the Walkway.
21. When we got down to the bottom of the Tower there were about 25 people there. They were mostly people from Grenfell Walk but also one of our neighbours from Hurstway Walk was there. Everyone was standing there in shock. No one was even taking photographs. They just could not believe what was happening.
22. At that point the fire was only on one side of the Tower, on the north side, but the fire was spreading up the building in a massive line from the bottom of the

Tower to nearly the top, which is the 23rd floor. We were standing on the north side, at the base of the Tower on the green. At first the fire went straight up and down and then it started spreading outwards and round the corners of the Tower. The flames coming out of some of the flats seemed to be blue. The flames on the building were mainly orange. I thought that the blue flames were burning gas. I could feel the heat from the Tower – my daughter was so hot she took off her jacket. I could see debris falling from the Tower – I think it was the cladding. It was landing near where we were standing.

23. I saw a fire truck but we could not see any firefighters where we were standing – I think maybe they had gone round to the entrance. I could hear people screaming from the Tower, saying “help me, help me.” My daughter was crying. It was so upsetting to see.

24. My daughter called Mierna again and tried to tell her to get out. Mierna said her flat was full of smoke and too hot to get out. My daughter sent her a picture on WhatsApp at 2.40am of the fire outside the Tower so she could see what was happening. She tried to tell her friend how serious the fire was and that she needed to try to escape.

25. I think that many people in the area were awake because of Ramadan. People had been coming out of the mosque. I saw some people try to go into the Tower to help people. I knew from experience of being in Grenfell Tower before that the stairs in the Tower were really tiring to climb, so I did not think people would be able to get very high up the building. It was dark so it was difficult to see who was there, but there were lots of people by this time. Everyone I could see was crying.

26. My daughter and I were desperately searching for people who we knew from the Tower, to see if they had got out alive. We were especially looking for Mierna’s family. Mierna had stopped picking up her phone.

27. My daughter was trying to talk to the police to try to find out where her friends were and what was going on, but the police did not know anything.

28. We were running around all over the place. We met Mierna's aunt outside near the Tower who normally lives with the family in the Tower. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] I think that is why she was not inside. She was desperately searching as well for her family. She was trying to call them and trying to get information about where they were.
29. There were a couple of other families we knew, for example the El-Wahabi family. I was trying to call them on my phone but I could not get through to them, and we were running around in the dark shouting people's names and trying to see people's faces.
30. We stayed down near the bottom of the Tower for a while, and then the police came and told us to move away. People who were outside the Tower wanted to go in to help people. I saw about two or three people come out of the building. They were wrapped up in silver blankets. Some of them couldn't breathe and they were given gas masks or water by paramedics outside. I saw a big group of boys from the mosque, and some of them were trying to go into the Tower. I did not recognise any individuals because it was dark and I was upset. I saw that the police officers would not let them go back in. Everyone was crying, it was so awful to see. Children and adults were all crying. It was really shocking to watch.
31. The police moved us away and we went round to Latimer Road station which was the closest you could now get to the Tower. We wanted to try to get closer, to see what was going on and to try to get more people out, but all the access routes were blocked off.
32. I saw some firefighters outside the Tower but it did not seem like very many. When people came out, the firefighters were taking them to safety. There may have been more firefighters inside the Tower, but I did not see them. I did see lots of police and ambulances.
33. My daughter spoke to Mierna again at about 3.30am. Mierna told [REDACTED] that their flat was really hot and full of smoke and that she did not think they could

get out. When my daughter got off the phone to Mierna, she told me that the whole family was crying so much. That was the last time my daughter spoke to Mierna and the family. The two of us were both crying uncontrollably now.

34. I remember seeing a woman who was crying on the floor. She was an Eritrean woman – I think it might have been someone who lived on the 21st floor but I am not sure. I think her son had died in the Tower. She was shouting “My son! My son!” and screaming on the floor.
35. We stayed out of the house until about 6am, by Latimer Road station. We were just talking to people and trying to get information, hoping to find the people that we knew from the Tower.
36. Eventually we came back to the flat. My daughter needed to get her medication, which is why we came back. At first the police would not let us in to the building, but eventually they did. Then I went to work. My colleagues could not believe it when I turned up at work after what had just happened. I think I must have been in shock because I don’t think I would have gone into work if I hadn’t been.

People we knew

37. Nadia and Baseem’s whole family died that night. That’s Mierna, her two younger siblings, Nadia and Baseem and the grandmother. We knew they had died before it was public – it was obvious that they could not have escaped. Afterwards Mierna’s aunt was keeping some of her things in our house as she did not have enough space in the hotel room, so we knew when things became confirmed.
38. My daughter counted Mierna as family, like a sister. They used to do everything together. ■■■ would spend a lot of time at their house; she said it had more atmosphere than at our home because there were so many people about. My daughter’s father is not around and Bassem acted like a father

figure to her. I remember at Mierna's tenth birthday he hugged [REDACTED] and said she was like a daughter to him. [REDACTED] was so happy when he said that.

39. We knew quite a few other people in the Tower too. I was friends with the El-Wahabi family. I tried to call them that night but I could not get through. The mother, father and three children all died. They are also Moroccan. They have lived here the whole time I have lived here so I knew them well. Fouzia El-Wahabi and I would go to parties together and sit in the park.

40. A couple of my daughter's classmates died in the fire. Most of the children round here know each other from playing out together, so she knows a lot of the families who lived in the Tower.

Impact

41. I don't wish at this time to go into detail about the impact the fire has had and what happened after the fire. I will say though that it has changed both my life and my daughter's life. We will never forget what we saw on that night and the people who died.

42. After the fire we had to stay in a hotel in West London. We stayed there for seven days, and then we moved to another hotel in Paddington. The doctors told us to stay in the hotel rather than go home because my daughter has a medical condition which means that she needs to be able to take care of herself properly, and have access to hot water and so on. We stayed there until mid-April 2018. My daughter had only been out of hospital for a few days before the fire happened. The fire was a real set back for her. We now understand that she was in shock for about three days after the fire. She has told me that she just kept replaying what had happened over and over again. The impact on her has been devastating. I don't want to go into detail in this statement about what this has been like for her.

43. I have really struggled to cope with what happened and I have had counselling from the GP. We only recently were able to return to the flat and this has been really difficult for us both.

Statement of truth

I believe that the facts stated in this statement are true.

I am willing for this statement to form part of the evidence before the Inquiry and to be published on the Inquiry's website.

Signed: Nadia

Dated: 10/7/2018

Nadia Elbouti