

## IN THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

## WITNESS STATEMENT OF RAMIRO URBANO

I, Ramiro Urbano, previously of Flat 176 Grenfell Tower, Grenfell Road, London W11 1TQ, WILL SAY as follows:

**Background**

1. I was born in [REDACTED] 1963 and moved to London on my 15<sup>th</sup> birthday. My first language is Spanish, but I speak English fluently.
2. My wife, Adriana Ramirez (born [REDACTED] 1979), daughters Melanie Urbano Ramirez (born [REDACTED] 1997) and Jessica Urbano Ramirez (born [REDACTED] 2004), and I moved to Grenfell Tower about 6 years ago. We were council tenants, and paid our rent to the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (KCTMO). We lived in Flat 176 of Grenfell Tower which was a 2 bedroom flat. Before the refurbishment our flat was on the 17<sup>th</sup> floor of the building, but after the floors were renumbered it was on the 20<sup>th</sup> floor. We never had any pets.
3. In early 2017, Adriana and I separated. I hoped this would be temporary, and wanted to stay close to my daughters, so I asked my old friend Oscar Millan, who also lived at Grenfell Tower, if I could stay with him. I had known him for many years. He agreed, so I moved in with him and his adult daughter, Stephanie Millan, in Flat 36 on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of the building. It was a two bedroom flat with the same layout as Flat 176. The two flats (and every other flat ending in "6") were on the same corner of the building, directly above/below each other. I mostly slept on the couch while I lived at Oscar's, but if Stephanie was away at friends' or her mother's, I used her bed.

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4. I have worked as a bus driver for the past 2 years. Before that, I worked in catering. I was working for Tower Transit in Westbourne Park at the time of the fire, and still work there now. Melanie was at university in Coventry but at the time of the fire she was home visiting. Jessica was a full time student in Year 8 at the time of the fire. We were all in good health with no mobility restrictions.

### History at Grenfell Tower

5. We were living in temporary accommodation in Haggerston when RBKC offered us Flat 176. Flat 176 was our last offer from RBKC and they said we had to take it, or leave it and find private accommodation to live in. I had been to the building before to attend parties at Oscar Millan's home so was familiar with it. We knew the law had changed: as Melanie and Jessica were both girls, and Melanie wasn't 18 yet, we would only be eligible for a 2 bedroom flat. Jessica's school was only a stone's throw away from the building; Adriana and I decided to take the flat. Oscar helped us move in.
6. When we moved into the flat it had a new kitchen and an old linoleum floor. The council gave us £200 to buy paint, and we painted the walls and put carpets in the bedrooms. Our front door was always dodgy. It didn't always close automatically as it was meant to. It was also supposed to lock automatically when you closed it and put the handle up from the inside, but it didn't, so we would have to lock it with the key. I called the council to complain about it a couple of times but it was never fixed. The door had a letterbox which did shut automatically.
7. The only fire safety information I can remember receiving when we moved in was in our tenancy agreement. The agreement had sections about noise, having pets and so on, and I think it also set out information about fire exits at Grenfell Tower. I don't remember getting any information about what we should do in the event of a fire. I just assumed that we should use the stairs to get out of the building rather than the lift. There were no fire extinguishers or break glass fire alarms in the building as far as I know.

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8. I remember hearing testing of the communal fire alarm in the past, so I thought there was an alarm that would go off if there was a fire in another part of the building. I knew there had been a couple of fires at Grenfell Tower before, but that they had been contained. I can't remember there having been fires in the building after we moved in.
9. We had 2 smoke alarms in our flat, one in the kitchen and the other in the corridor. The alarm in the kitchen went off whenever we cooked something smoky - Jessica's job was to fan it with a cushion. I wasn't aware that the London Fire Brigade did fire checks of flats, and never asked for one.
10. A floor plan of Flat 176 is shown at Appendix I to this statement. As you entered our front door there was a small utility cupboard on your left side. The main bedroom was opposite the front door. As you walked out of the main bedroom there was a corridor on your left, which had a bathroom on the right-hand side. The toilet was adjacent to the bathroom. If you carried on down the corridor, the door to an open plan kitchen and sitting room were on the right-hand side. There had been sliding doors between the kitchen and sitting room but we removed those to make it open plan. There was also a direct entrance to the sitting room on the left-hand side of the corridor.

#### **Refurbishment of Grenfell Tower**

11. I was happy when I found out that Grenfell Tower was going to be refurbished. At the reception desk on the ground floor they had pictures of how the building would look at the end, once the cladding was put on. They said it would look nice, and that the building would be warmer, with less condensation. We didn't have a clue about the risks. I thought it was nice that they were fixing up the place.
12. As part of the renovations, they said they would change the windows from single to double glazed. With the old windows, we could hear a lot of noise from outside. I was happy that we were going to get double glazing but when they came to fit the windows I felt it they rushed the job. I had to phone up KCTMO because one of the windows had been put in the wrong way. They came back and repaired it. There was an

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extractor fan in the new kitchen window which we discovered made a racket even when it was off. I called KCTMO and again they came in and fixed it. It didn't give any problems after that.

13. Another issue we had was with the vents on the walls in the 20<sup>th</sup> floor landing, which were put in during the renovations. I think they were there to prevent smoke from coming through to every floor in the event of a fire, but sometimes at night they would make a very loud noise, like an engine. I complained to the council and I know others did too. It was so loud.
14. The builders also had to come in at one point to re-seal the pipes under our bathtub because they were leaking. I am not sure whether the leaky pipes were related to the refurbishment. Another time, our bathroom and hallway flooded badly. We phoned up KCTMO and asked what the hell was going on, and they came, had a look, and said the water was coming from the flat above us. It was an ongoing issue for a couple of months. Eventually they fixed it, but it took quite a while and then happened again. Afterwards, the panels in kitchen and bathroom had to be changed because they had rotted from sitting in water for so long.
15. There were 2 lifts in Grenfell Tower. The builders overloaded the lifts when they were doing the refurbishment and after they finished, the lifts kept breaking down. I heard that quite a number of people got stuck in the lifts though I never did.
16. Sometimes neither lift worked so we had to use the stairwell. There were lots of elderly people living at Grenfell Tower, and the lifts used to go out during the weekends sometimes. Everyone did their grocery shopping on the weekends and I would see people struggling with their bags on the stairs. Jessica liked using the stairs; sometimes she would run up to our floor and try to beat the lifts. The stairwell lights usually worked, though there were sometimes gaps between functioning bulbs.
17. The lifts were pretty big, but sometimes during the morning school run, they would be full by the time they reached the middle of the building, like the 13<sup>th</sup> floor or whatever, and a mum with a child in a pram would push the pram into the lift, then take the

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stairs, and meet the lift down on the ground floor.

18. Before the fire, I thought the building was safe. It's only now, after what happened that I think that a building like that should have had at least 2 fire escapes. The staircase was so narrow. In a stampede of people, of course we wouldn't be able to get out. If the council had offered to install sprinklers in our flat before the fire I would have said yes. I had two daughters, and anything that could benefit their safety, I would have thought, why not?

### 13 and 14 June 2017

19. I arrived at Flat 36 at about 5pm on Monday 13 June 2017. I think I was off from work that day. Oscar was already at home. Stephanie wasn't in that evening. I think she was at her boyfriend's place. Oscar is a good cook and prepared a nice meal. We ate, I got my uniform ready for work the next morning, and then I went to bed.
20. I probably went to sleep around 9pm that night. I used Stephanie's bed. Sometime after I had fallen asleep, Oscar woke me up, saying that there was a funny smell. He knocked on the bedroom door wearing only his nightclothes. I could see that he was panicking, so I quickly jumped out of bed. There was no smoke in my bedroom at that point. He called me into the kitchen. It had been a warm summer day, so the kitchen window was open. When I walked out of the bedroom through the corridor, and looked into the kitchen, I saw flames coming through the kitchen window. They were orange. Oscar had a little fire extinguisher which he tried to use, but it didn't function. I grabbed a jug, filled it with water from the kitchen tap, and started throwing water out the window on the flames.
21. We could see the PVC from the window melting. As the window burned, more and more toxic-smelling smoke came into the kitchen. Suddenly, a gust of wind seemed to blow the fire in through the kitchen window. Originally there was a sliding door separating the kitchen from the lounge, but Oscar had removed this, and had then put a plank of wood where the door railings used to be. All of a sudden that plank of wood fell down.

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22. Oscar said we should run. He went to his bedroom and grabbed his passport. I went to Stephanie's bedroom and put my work trousers and socks on. My work trousers were already laid out as I had planned to leave for work at 5:30am that morning. I grabbed my wallet and mobile phone and ran out without even putting a shirt on. I didn't feel I had time to spare.
23. At the point that we left the flat, the whole kitchen window was aflame and the wind was blowing flames into the kitchen. You could hear a cracking noise as the PVC melted. The smoke alarm in the kitchen had gone off.
24. When I came out of the front door of the flat I could see fire hoses in the corridor and a couple of firefighters on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor landing. Oscar told them that the fire was coming into our kitchen from downstairs. The firefighters made as if to go into our flat to deal with the fire there, so we left the front door to the flat open.
25. Later, Oscar told me that Stephanie's bedroom never burned. He saw photographs of the flat and went to the flat after the fire, and he said all my lotion and clothes were fine, and that the little cupboard at the entrance to flat was also fine. The rest of the flat was completely destroyed.
26. I said to the firefighters, "my family is on the 20<sup>th</sup> floor, in flat 176" and said that I had to go upstairs to them, but they said, "no one is going upstairs" and told me to keep walking down, so I did. I assumed that with the firefighters there, the fire would soon be controlled and there would be plenty of time for my family to get out. At that point, I didn't yet know that Jessica was alone in the flat.
27. I can't remember if I saw any other firefighters in the stairwell. I remember I could see well in the stairwell, and could smell something that reminded me of burning cables, a strong, toxic, burning smell. There wasn't any visible smoke. Oscar and I were lucky to be one of the first people to leave the building. Being on the floor we were on, and the corner of the building where the fire started meant that we found out about it when other people were still sleeping and had no idea what was going on. I think I saw a couple of residents leaving the building in the stairwell as we went down but I can't be sure. I was just concentrating on running. The time on the CCTV image shows me

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leaving the building, shirtless, at 1:21am.

28. When I got out of the building I looked back and up, and could see the fire had reached the 10<sup>th</sup> floor of the building. There were quite a few people standing outside in front of the building, don't know if they were residents from Grenfell Tower or from surrounding blocks.
29. As I left the building I saw Melanie about 100 metres from the front entrance. She was just coming home. She told me that Jessica was by herself in the flat as Adriana had gone out, and told me that she, Melanie, had spoken with a firefighter, had given him keys to flat 176 and had told him that Jessica was in there.
30. I immediately tried calling Adriana from my mobile phone, but she didn't answer so I asked Melanie to ring her. She did, and Adriana picked up. Melanie told Adriana that there was a fire in the building, and that Jessica was inside. A few minutes later, Adriana arrived. She said that she had spoken with Jessica, who had called her from someone else's phone number. We watched as the fire reached and passed the 20<sup>th</sup> floor of the building. I was crazy with worry by that point, in a panic, shouting. My nephew, Jason Garcia, was with us that night as well as Melanie's boyfriend. We could hear crackling as the building burned, and chunks of burning material started to fall off of the building.
31. We stayed outside of the building for the entire morning watching who came out of the building to see if they were Jessica. We could see people at the windows waving handkerchiefs and calling out for help. I took some videos and photographs that night but haven't been able to retrieve them.
32. I was still shirtless, so some people from the local area gave me a t-shirt to wear and I walked around trying to find Jessica. We ended up near Latimer Road Station after somebody said they had seen Jessica around there.

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### Aftermath of the fire

45. I can't remember seeing anyone official from RBKC or KCTMO in the days after the fire, but those days are a blur for me. I was just intent on finding Jessica. There were so many people who told us they had seen Jessica, so we went to hospitals, searched the streets.
46. My sister, Sandra Ruiz, and my brothers, were more involved in going to the relief centres than we were. Eventually, somehow, we were put in a hotel. Before that, I was staying with Jason at his place. About a week or week and a half after the fire, we were allocated a Family Liaison Officer. Weeks later, it was confirmed to us that Jessica died in the fire. Her remains were found on the 23<sup>rd</sup> floor of the building.

### Other matters

47. I made a statement to the Metropolitan Police on 1 November 2017. The only media interview I gave was immediately after the fire, outside of St Mary's Hospital. I was asking for help, asking if anyone had seen Jessica.
48. I can only say that the Grenfell fire, and losing my daughter Jessica, has changed my life completely. It's just not the same. There are a lot of ups and downs. I am a bus driver in Ladbroke Grove, and regularly pick up my daughter's friends, but of course Jessica is never with them. I just look at them and think, "Jessica should be here". I often pass a bus stop near Ladbroke Grove with a big drawing in graffiti of Jessica. It's just hard.
49. I think I'd break down if I tried to give oral evidence at the Inquiry. Maybe in time if things change, I would be able to do this, but I don't think I could now.

**I believe that the content of this witness statement is true.**

Signed: Ramiro Urbano Dated: 14-05-18

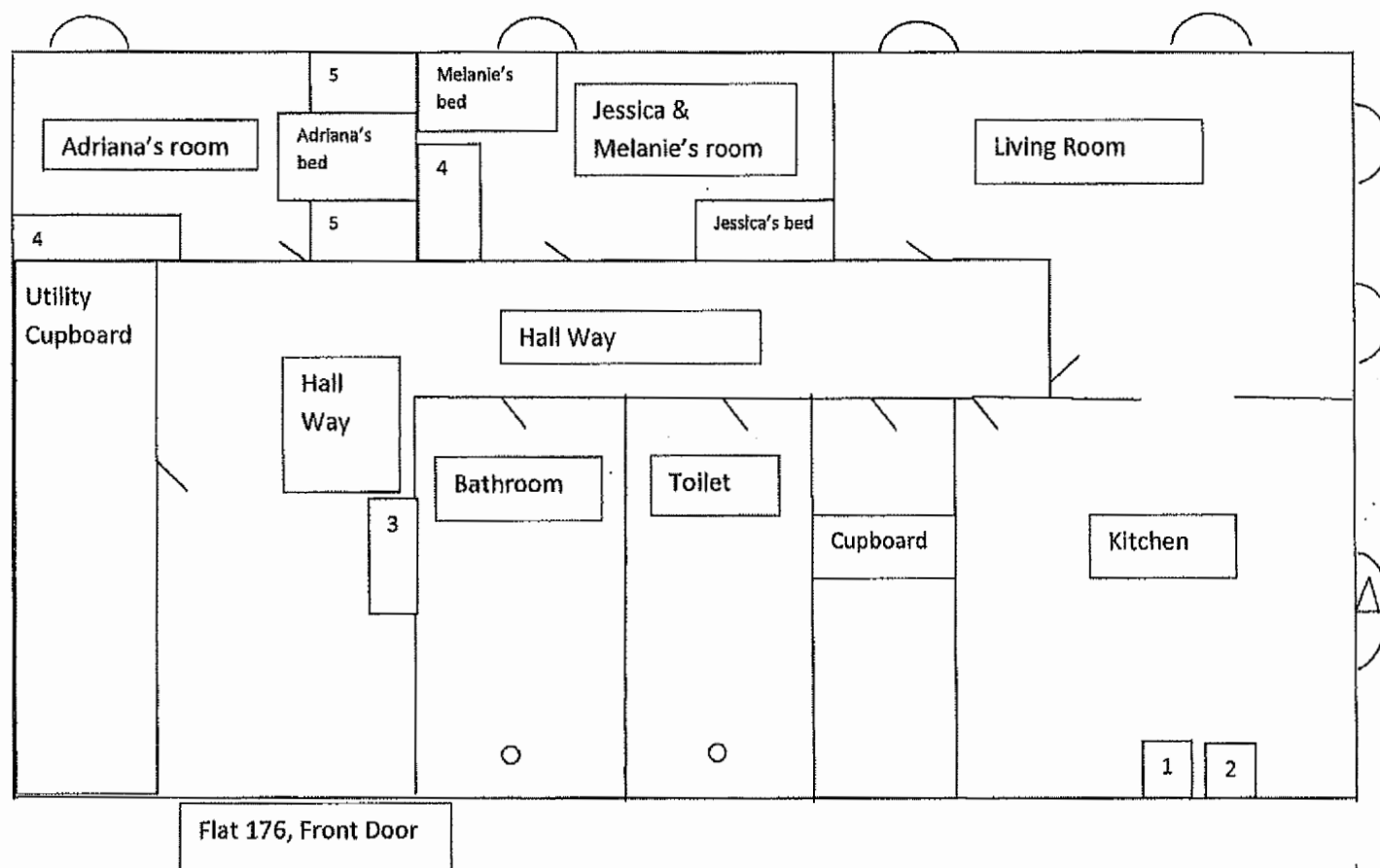
**Ramiro Urbano**

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## APPENDIX I

## RAMIRO URBANO, FLOOR PLAN, FLAT 176



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*Ramiro U.*

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