

## **WITNESS STATEMENT OF REBIN SABIR**

### **Background**

- (1) In June 2017 I was a happy and healthy 27 year old final year student studying Computer Network Engineering at London Metropolitan University. I was born on [REDACTED] 1990. Before the fire I was also training to become a barber whilst working part time as an Uber driver to make some extra money.
- (2) Due to financial hardship I was experiencing whilst studying, my cousin Alan Anwar Ali allowed me to stay with him temporarily. Alan and I are not blood related but he is a friend of the family as we are from the same Country [REDACTED] - so I see him as family.
- (3) [REDACTED] I am fluent in English - both spoken and written.
- (4) Alan lived at Flat 23 on the fifth floor of Grenfell Tower. He had a two bedroom flat which was one of the corner flats in the tower. One side looks out facing the Walkway blocks and the other side looks out towards the Latimer Road Underground Station.
- (5) I know that Alan was renting the flat from Kensington and Chelsea Council. I had been living at Grenfell Tower for about six to eight weeks leading up to the 14<sup>th</sup> June but Alan had occupied the property for over twenty years. In the time I have lived in the flat, I had no cause to report any fault or take any complaint to the Council. In any event my cousin Alan would have that information and things like this would have been raised through him.
- (6) Grenfell Tower had been newly refurbished prior to me moving in with Alan. I believe the refurbishment included alterations to flat 23 but as this was all done before I moved in I cannot confirm what changes were made to either flat 23 or the building. I never really spoke to Alan about what had be done to the building but he did mention the windows had been replaced with plastic frames and sills.
- (7) Each floor has six flats in total, but as I had only been there for a short time, I cannot say who lived in the other flats.

- (8) I would often chat with other people who lived in the block when our paths would cross on the ground floor, usually in the lift area, but I wouldn't be able to say which flats they lived in as I didn't visit anybody in their flats.
- (9) Everybody was always very nice and pleasant although because I was very engrossed in my studies while I was living in the block I did not get to know anyone in the block other than to say hello in the communal areas.
- (10) It was a very family orientated place, full of families, many with young children.
- (11) We were a community.

**The communal areas of Grenfell Tower**

- (12) As far as the landing goes, I do not know if there was a communal building fire alarms, sprinklers, 'break glass in event of emergency' boxes, fire extinguishers or other fire-fighting equipment. I was not aware of any fire notices or signs telling residents what to do in the event of a fire.
- (13) I would usually use the lifts to get to the flat. The lift was often not working in which case I would take the stairs. The staircase was separated by doors leading to each floor. I do not know if the doors were fire doors or not but I do remember them being very heavy and self-closing.
- (14) I'm not sure if any electrical lighting was in the staircase, and I cannot say if there are any visible numbers or signs showing what floor you had reached. If they were there they were well hidden as I really don't remember seeing them.

**In the event of a fire**

- (15) In the event of a fire in any high rise building, I understand that you should not use the lifts to evacuate. This is common knowledge for me and not something that Council or the TMO had told me. In the Grenfell Tower, there was only one way in and one way out via the stairs or lift. The staircase itself was quite narrow. It would only allow two people side by side to use it. But even that was a tight squeeze so if somebody was ever coming down the stairs as I was going up I would always just wait for them to pass me.

- (16) In the time I was staying in the flat, there has never, to my knowledge, been any kind of evacuation practice. I have spoken to the other residents, some of whom have lived in the tower for many years and none have said there has ever been such a practice.
- (17) As far as I am aware, in the event of a fire, the responsibility for fighting fire is with the London Fire Brigade and not residents who are not trained to do so.
- (18) In the time I was there, I was not aware of any fire in the tower or electrical problems with the tower.

**Flat 23**

- (19) On entering the front door of flat 23 there is a corridor leading to the bigger of the two bedrooms which is where I slept. There is a second bedroom next to the big bedroom and the corridor bends round to the right leading to the living room and kitchen.
- (20) The living room has windows which look out in both directions on the corner of the tower. All the windows were double glazed so you would not hear much noise from outside or smell cooking from other flats if all windows were closed.
- (21) The flat had a smoke alarm in the kitchen above the oven and perhaps in the hallway but I cannot say for sure. The front door was new but I do not know if it was a fire door or not but I do remember it being very heavy and self-closing.

**Night of the fire**

- (22) On 13th June I arrived at the tower at about 7.30-8pm. I can't remember where I was coming from but I would have used the lifts to get to the fifth floor as I only used the stairs when the lifts weren't working. From memory the lifts were working on 13<sup>th</sup> June.
- (23) I was on my own in the flat just chilling until around 10pm when my friend, Milad called to say he would come over to hang out with me. I think he arrived at some point between 10:30pm and 11:00pm.

- (24) We hung out in between the living room kitchen area which was open plan as the kitchen had sliding doors which we had pulled open. We listened to music and just chilled out. [REDACTED] we [REDACTED] had something light to eat, fruits mainly, nothing which involved using the oven or stove.
- (25) Milad and I first smelt smoke at around 12am on the morning of 14<sup>th</sup> June. Milad was anxious about the smell but I wasn't fazed initially and just thought the smell would pass. At this point there was no clear signs of fire. I would have expected to hear fire alarms going off if it was something serious so I took comfort that the alarm wasn't going off and confident that nothing serious was happening.
- (26) We both looked around the flat for evidence of fire. As the Kitchen door was open we could see the entire kitchen and the living room area, so I didn't have to move from the sofa to see that nothing was burning in the flat.
- (27) Milad said "something is burning, there is something burning here", I reassured him that nothing was burning and we continued chilling out, chatting and listening to music. Although I was confident that nothing was burning in the flat the smell remained continuously throughout.
- (28) Not long after, Milad became anxious about the smell of burning and smoke again. I heard loud voices/shouting coming from outside. I didn't think too much of it at the time as I just put it down to people returning from the Mosque as it was Ramadam and Grenfell Tower had a large Muslim community, 70-80% I would estimate. In hindsight this should have sent alarm bells ringing as the windows were double glazed and closed but we could still hear the chaos from outside.
- (29) The noise carried on for perhaps 10 – 20 minutes and it started to get louder and more intense. There seemed to be women screaming and more voices seemed to be joining in.
- (30) Milad went to the living room window to see what was going on outside. He was shocked and told me, "something terrible is going on here". I immediately

joined him at the living room window and I looked out overlooking the Walkway estate. This must have been at some point between 12-1am.

- (31) I could see people scrambling around at speed on the ground. There were fire fighters and police at the base of the tower. People were trying to get closer to the tower but the police were pushing them back. I saw people looking up at the tower shouting, "don't jump, please don't jump".
- (32) It was obvious that they were calling out to people in the higher floors in the tower. I opened the window fully so I could shout down to the people on the ground to find out what was happening and to my horror they screamed back "the building is on fire".
- (33) I was in shock but as I couldn't see the fire from the window I was looking from I asked how much of the building was on fire and whether it was under control as I didn't want to panic unnecessarily if everything was in hand.
- (34) I remember a guy shouting up at me "bro, it is out of control". He looked frightened and worried.
- (35) It was odd because the people on the ground were telling me to come down and get out but firefighters told us to stay where we were. I hesitated for a minute as I was in a state of confusion and didn't know who to listen to - the professionals or the civilians. I made the decision to listen to the people on the ground and try to leave the flat and the tower. The people on the ground just looked so distressed which convinced me that leaving the flat was the best thing to do. I told Milad who had the same idea but he was panicking so I told him to be calm.
- (36) Although I had made up my mind that it was probably best to try and leave the flat, I still wanted to know where the fire was and how far it had spread. I was curious, so I left the living room window and went to the kitchen window to look outside. I looked up, down and to the right.
- (37) I saw what I can only describe as a horrible light of fire. It was late so it was dark outside which meant I could really see the light shining brightly from the

fire. It was the illumination of the fire I could see and I could clearly smell the cladding burning; I could hear the burning and the sound of the fire, but at this time the fire still had not reached the edge of the building closest to our flat on the north side. This was roughly 12.30am.

- (38) Whilst at the window, I saw Milad run to the front door to check the communal corridor. I started to prepare myself mentally to leave the flat although I saw no point collecting any property as I naturally thought the fire would be brought under control before any catastrophic damage would occur. I kept telling myself we would be allowed back in at some point so all I needed to do was grab my phone, keys and a jacket.
- (39) Milad opened the front door and shut it quickly. He came back to the living room and said he saw horrible, dark and thick smoke. The smoke was trapped on the landing outside the flat. I didn't really believe him at first and I was almost laughing at him as he was visibly afraid but I didn't fully understand his anxiety at this point.
- (40) I went to the door to see what he was talking about and I could not see anything through this smoke. The smoke was poisonous and I immediately started coughing. I did not see actual flames but there was orange fire cinders floating in the smoke. Milad started coughing. There seemed to be some kind of alarm sounding as if from another flat. It was quite muffled. I don't think it was a central alarm, it was far too quiet.
- (41) It was only seconds but it was obvious that we were not going to be able to escape safely using the stairs. The smoke was monstrous and attacking. We could not see; we could not breathe and I did not even open the door fully. As far as I could see, this was our only means of escape and it was now closed to us. We would not have made it. It was the most amount of smoke you would expect to see in your life, there was no way to describe how scary it was, it's beyond measure. There was like small flames of the fire in the smoke, like a hand sized flame. I slammed the door shut as smoke was forcing its way into the flat.



- (42) I closed the door within 2-3 seconds so only puffs of smoke above your head were able to enter the flat. No more smoke came into the flat (at this point) once the door was closed. I note that the alarm inside the flat did not sound. I do not know if it was battery operated or wired into the mains. I think it works by battery. It has previously gone off as a result of cooking so I assumed it was working.
- (43) As far as I could see, we were trapped in flat 23.
- (44) At this point, we were faced with the horrible choice of staying in the flat and dying in the fire or jumping with unknown results. In my mind it was definite that I would jump rather than choosing to remain in the fire. Before taking this step I knew the only alternative was being rescued by the firefighters if possible.
- (45) We both rushed back to the window to try and get help. I remember we opened like 4 or 5 windows in the living room to let out the smoke which had entered the flat when we opened the door, but also to catch the attention of the fire fighters outside. Milad went to living room window and started shouting to a fire fighter. This must have been around 12.45 going to 1.00am.
- (46) I started shouting loudly for help from kitchen window. I could see the glow of fire to my left and right. We were trapped and the fire was approaching the flat. This was the first time I saw the fire from out of the kitchen window. The first time I looked I could just see the light shining from the fire but this time I could actually see the flames.
- (47) I could see the smoke from the fire and hear the cladding burning. I was petrified. The smoke was pitch black and was covering the sky. Milad was very distressed. I was too, but as I am older than him I didn't want to show it. Milad kept speaking to the firefighters. I think they were telling him that they were going to rescue us.
- (48) I left the kitchen to join Milad in the living room. Milad was still talking to the fire fighters outside. I looked out of one of the windows in the living room which

overlooked the Walkways by the gym. I looked up and left and could see smoke and flames from the fire.

- (49) Suddenly, to my shock two firefighters wearing oxygen masks came into the flat. This surprised me as I couldn't understand where they came from and how they got into the flat as we closed the door behind us. I remember they were two enormous fire fighters. The fire fighters told us to stay where we were near the window and not near the front door. They told us they would get help from outside to come and rescue us. They told us not to move or try to leave via the front door as there was no way out.
- (50) I remember thinking to myself, why did they come to just leave straight after without us. It didn't make sense to me. If anything, I was left feeling worse as the firefighters accepted that there was no possible route out for us using the stairs. The only option was to wait and do as we were told. We had no choice. We had to trust them.
- (51) It was very difficult as the people outside kept saying, "come down, come down, the fire is out of control". They could see everything that we could not see from the outside, but they didn't know that the corridor was filled with smoke and we had no way out.
- (52) We went back to the window and waited to be rescued. We could hear the most harrowing noises from the flats above. Screams and crying for help from people trapped on higher floors. Grown men weeping and children calling out for their parents. People were putting their phones out of the window with their torch lights on to attract the attention of the fire fighters and people on the ground.
- (53) The smell of the cladding burning was so strong. I could hear the fire roaring from the corner of the building.
- (54) After about 10 minutes, I saw below on the bridge to the Walkway (on the South side of the tower) firefighters had brought a ladder which they put against the building. The ladder was positioned below the living room but it was too short.



There was no way we could have got to it. The firefighters took the ladder down and were telling us to stay where we were.

- (55) I saw there was a fire engine with a longer ladder to the left of the window but this did not give us any comfort because there was no access point for the vehicle at the base of the tower.
- (56) I now felt real fear. The smoke had completely consumed the communal corridor; fire fighters had come to the flat and left us as they too accepted it wasn't safe to take us down via the stairs, and now the fire fighters had tried to save us externally but the ladder was too short. It seemed hopeless. I was preparing myself mentally to die in the flat. I really didn't think we would get out but I had to remain positive for Milad.
- (57) Milad is only twenty one and was in total shock. He became very emotional so I tried to calm him down. I now saw that the only option left was for us to jump. Milad and I spoke about jumping and we both agreed that we would jump. I thought that this would inevitably lead to severe injury, if not death, but I thought we had to try as burning to death is the worst possible death.
- (58) I decided to use my mobile to record some footage to let people know how we died. I was doing it to say goodbye to my loved ones and I made some phone calls to friends and family to let them know what was happening.
- (59) Moments after making the video, Milad told me that the fire fighters were bringing another ladder to the tower. The ladder was placed on the bridge below us this time against the side of the building. It only just reached and was not long enough for us to hold on to the top as we stepped out of the window.
- (60) It was very frightening to climb out onto the ladder. There was nothing at the top of the ladder to lock it onto the building or secure it. The ladder itself was very narrow and flimsy but it was our only chance of survival.

- (61) A fire fighter came up to the top of the ladder and told us we would have to descend one by one. He gave some direction about how we should leave the flat and to get onto the ladder.
- (62) Milad was very scared and wanted to go second allowing me down first. I knew that if I left him up there he might not actually do it so I told him to go first and he did.
- (63) The firefighter walked down the ladder a little bit of distance behind Milad giving him space to climb out onto the top of the ladder. When Milad did this the firefighter directed Milad and they both went down the ladder together.
- (64) As this happened, I deleted the good bye video I had just taken on my mobile phone as I now had hope that I would make it out of the building alive. I started to film Milad going down the ladder.
- (65) When Milad reached halfway down the ladder at roughly 2.19am, I recorded footage inside the flat as you could see the smoke circulating at the top of the rooms. I quickly opened the front door and recorded the communal corridor as well. On opening the front door this time I could see the smoke was only 20% of what it had been the first time we opened the door. The fire fighters' hoses had probably reached our floor at this stage.
- (66) I attach the video I took at 2:19am to my statement marked exhibit "RS1". As I said, the video shows Milad using the ladder to exit the flat. In the background you can clearly see the first ladder on the ground which was abandoned as it was too short. You can also see the fire engine with erected ladder to the left which could not get to the building as there was no access point for vehicles.
- (67) The video then shows the orange flames emerging from the side of the building facing the Westway sports centre.
- (68) When I record the communal corridor you can hear from the footage the internal fire alarm from somebody's flat. It was very faint so I assume it is the alarm from somebody's flat. It was too quiet to be a communal fire alarm as it couldn't

be heard when the front door was closed so there was no way it would have woken up people from sleep.

- (69) I went back to the window and the firefighter talked me out onto the ladder ledge and guided me down the ladder.
- (70) As I left the flat, I knew the front door was shut but I did not close windows or turn off any electricity or gas. To be honest I wasn't thinking straight. I just wanted to get down to the floor and out of the tower.
- (71) Once I got to the bottom of the ladder at roughly 2.26am, I started to move away from the tower onto the Walkway where Milad was standing. As I did, I heard people standing nearby shouting, "don't jump".
- (72) I looked round facing the West side of the block and I saw a female falling from the tower. I watched as she dropped to the ground landing about 8 – 10 metres away from me. I was absolutely horrified. I stood there in disbelief. She did not move. I knew she was gone.
- (73) I screamed for the firefighters and police officers to help her even though I knew there was no surviving that. Everyone was in shock. That sight will never leave me.
- (74) I walked towards the playground thinking about what I had just witnessed. That could have been Milad or I as we had contemplated jumping as well. I took a few more videos as I walked away. The fire was spreading so quickly. I saw the fire had reached the top of the tower (on Latimer Road tube station side).
- (75) From where I was standing I could see residents trapped in flats on the higher floors of the tower. I also saw people using mobile phones with the torch on. We shouted to the firefighters to help them; but they seemed powerless. They said they would do everything they could but the fire seemed unstoppable.
- (76) There were lots of people around us on the ground. Lots of shouting, screaming and crying. It was madness. Absolute chaos. I remember recording a video

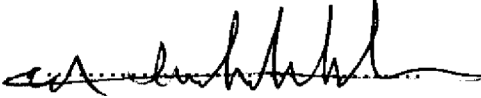
at roughly 2.52am of the fire roaring as it spread up the building. I was in a complete daze and I became separated from Milad who wanted to get away from the building as quickly as possible.

- (77) I must have watched the building burn in disbelief for hours as I filmed my last video at 4.00am before eventually taking a taxi to Milad's flat as I was officially homeless.
- (78) When I got to Milad's flat we spoke for a while about what just happened and how lucky we were to get out alive. We both felt guilty that so many people died in the fire and we had survived.
- (79) I put my phone on charge and fell asleep but only for a couple of hours.
- (80) My friend came to collect me and I spent a few days in Bournemouth before coming back to London.
- (81) I had to spend a few nights at Milad's place and even spent nights in my car until I was placed in a hotel with other residents who lost their homes.
- (82) I went to a Doctor at a walk-in centre seeking help as I was traumatised and struggling to forget what had happened. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]
- (83) I have not been the same since the fire. I may have survived flames but the old me died in the building that night as I am now no longer the same person. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]
- (84) I have had to defer my final year studies at University as I simply cannot function day to day let alone focus on my studies. I have also been unable to work since the fire.

(85) I have not spoken to any residents group about what happened. I was not aware of groups that have been set up since the fire to help residents.

The statement has been read to me by the office and I have been asked if I wish to add or change anything. At this stage, I do not wish to change anything. In the event I subsequently have further statements to make I understand that I can.

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

Signed: 

Dated: 11/01/2019

**WITNESS STATEMENT OF REBIN SABIR**

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**EXHIBIT "RS1"**

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Video footage.