

Statement of: KHANOM, ROHEMA

Form MG11(T)

Page 1 of 10

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

Criminal Procedure Rules, r27.2; Criminal Justice Act 1967, s.9; Magistrates' Courts Act 1980, s.5b

Statement of: KHANOM, ROHEMA

Age if under 18: Over 18 (if over 18 insert 'over 18')

Occupation: [REDACTED]

This statement (consisting of 8 page(s) each signed by me) is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I shall be liable to prosecution if I have wilfully stated in it anything which I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.

Signature: ROHEMA KHANOM

Date: 15/11/2017

Tick if witness evidence is visually recorded  (supply witness details on rear)

My statement is in relation to the fire on the 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017 at Grenfell Tower in which five members of my family lost their lives. They were council tenants and lived on the 17<sup>th</sup> floor, Flat 142 Grenfell Tower, Grenfell Road, London W11 1TQ.

In my statement I will mention the following people Mrs Rabaya BEGUM DOB 15/11/1952 my maternal aunt who I will refer to as my aunt, Kamru MIAH DOB 12/08/1937 my aunts husband who I will refer to as my uncle, Mohammed HAMID DOB 19/11/1989 my cousin who I will refer to as Hamid. Mohammed HANIF DOB 20/02/1991 my cousin who I will refer to as Hanif. Husna BEGUM DOB 04/02/1995 my cousin who I will refer to as Husna and Mohammed HAKIM DOB [REDACTED] my cousin who I will refer to as Hakim.

My aunt, uncle, Hamid Hanif and Husna all lost their live the fire at Grenfell Tower. Hakim is the only surviving son/brother of the family. Hakim visited the family in 142 Grenfell Tower on the evening of the 13<sup>th</sup> June 2017. It was during [REDACTED] so he stayed and broke fast with them before leaving to go home. Hakim wasn't in the flat at the time of the fire.

My aunt and uncle were lovely people they kept themselves to themselves and their life revolved around their family which meant everything to them. My uncle came to live in the UK from Bangladesh in the 1950's and worked as a chef. My aunt was a housewife and loved looking after her family. I can't say

Signature: Rohema KHANOM  
2019

Signature witnessed by:

they were really happy especially where they were living however they were content with their family life. Although my aunt and uncle have lived in the UK since the 1950's and 1980's respectively neither of them could speak English very well. They would often ask for my help to translate for them. I would visit them every couple of weeks to have a cup of tea and catch up. I lost my father in 1998 and since then my uncle had treated me and my sister like his own daughters, he was just like a father to me. My uncle was a very unwell man he had previously had a heart attack and two strokes. He was mobile but couldn't walk very far and was very slow. He took a large amount of medication. My aunt and my mother were very close sisters they would speak to one another on the phone 4 or 5 times per day and always prior to going to bed.

My cousins were more like brothers and sister to me than cousins. I was in contact by mobile phone most days with Husna. She would often pop over to my house for a chat and borrow my clothes. Husna was due to be married on the 29<sup>th</sup> July 2017 and start a new life. I had been helping her with her wedding preparations and had her wedding dress stored at my house as she was planning to get ready there on the morning of her wedding. I saw Hanif every day because he worked in the same store of [REDACTED] as I do. Hamid was unwell himself and suffered with Crohn's disease, he was quite frail. Even though he was unwell he still worked hard and was a good son ensuring his father made it to all his doctor and hospital appointments. Hamid and I had regular contact by phone he would often call me for a chat. I would also see him regularly when I visited my aunt and uncle. We were a very close family.

My aunt, uncle, Hamid, Hanif and Husna moved into Grenfell Tower during the 25<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> August 2016. I remember they were given the keys on Friday 25<sup>th</sup> August and moved in over the bank holiday weekend. I will explain fully later in my statement the circumstances around their move to Grenfell Towers.

I didn't know any of their neighbours and don't recall seeing anyone. I don't ever remember seeing or sharing a lift with anyone on the occasions I visited. My aunt did tell me there was a Middle Eastern lady living in one of the flats on her floor who lived with her son who was in his late 20's. I never saw them and cannot describe them. I do remember my aunt saying she was Muslim and wore her hijab which pleased her. I do not know anything else about them.

on the night of the 13<sup>th</sup> September 2016 I went to bed late but couldn't sleep. I can't explain why but

Signature: Rohema KHANOM  
2019

Signature witnessed by:

something didn't feel quite right. Prior to going to bed I usually close my phone case and don't generally look at it during the night. However on this particular night I had it open bedside my bed. At around 01.50 hrs on the 14<sup>th</sup> September I was feeling restless and noticed an incoming call from Husna. She never calls me in the early hours of the morning so I knew something was very wrong. I thought she was calling to tell me something had happened to my uncle.

When I answered the call Husna was panicked and said "What do I do there's a fire in our building come quickly". I told her to stuff the bottom of the doors to stop any smoke coming in. I reassured her and told her we would be on our way. I didn't ask her at this time if she had called the London Fire Brigade or what advice she had been given. We had a short conversation around 30 seconds long. I didn't think it would be a big deal I thought it was a small fire and that by the time I arrived the fire would be out and they would all be safe and well and if need be we would take them home to our house or to my mums. I woke my husband and told him, what had happened we had something to eat and called an Uber cab to make our way to them leaving home at around 02.20hrs.

I live in [REDACTED] and the journey to Grenfell Tower takes around 30 minutes that time in the morning. Whilst in the cab between 02.20 hrs and 02.50 hrs I made a call to Husna this was our second conversation. When Husna answered I could hear my aunt screaming hysterically and my uncle in the background reciting from the Quran. Husna asked me to speak to her mum as she didn't know what to do with her to calm her down and passed the phone to my aunt. My aunt said in a panicked voice "The fire is in the flat" "it has taken hold". I asked her where she was and I think she said they were in the boys' room meaning Hanif and Hamid's bedroom. I tried to calm her telling her help would be on its way. My aunt passed the phone back to Husna who said "It is dark, pitch black, in here" then hung up. I know they had been given advice to remain in their flat by the fire service but I can't remember if Husna told me that herself or another family member she had spoken to.

As we drew near to the Tower at around 02.50 hrs the roads were blocked as far back as Westfield's shopping centre. This was partly to do with the gas works being carried out in Latimer Road and the sheer volume of people and vehicles. We decided to get out of the taxi at Saint Ann's Road and run the rest of the way which took around 10 minutes. As I jumped out of the taxi I couldn't see the Tower but I could see and smell smoke, and as we drew closer I could hear the fire. As we approached Latimer Road I saw

Signature: Rohema KHANOM  
2019

Signature witnessed by:



people standing bare foot in their pyjamas observing the tower. That's when we saw Grenfell alight, this was where the road forks, one goes straight to the station and the other to the back of Grenfell Tower.

The closer we drew to the Tower the louder the sound of the fire grew. It was loud I almost wanted to block the sound out, I couldn't even hear people chattering. When we reached the pub opposite the station which is around 200 metres away from the Tower I caught my first sight of it ablaze. Police hadn't put cordons in yet but they were pushing people back telling them not to go any closer. I could see two fire engines near the base of the Tower. I could hear a crackling sound it was deafening and there was a strong smell of smoke in the air. I couldn't believe it I had never seen a fire so big before it was huge. It was like watching a real life health and safety video, like a bonfire only 20 times bigger then I had ever seen in my life. The fire was moving around the flames were wrapping their way around and up the building in a clockwise movement. There was no wind or rain. There was a helicopter flying above the tower I don't think that effected the fire in any way. We were running back and forth between the pub and the station trying to get a better view. I was continuously trying to phone Hanif and Hamid's phone but no one was picking up. I stood watching with my husband and from where we were standing I could see the building was ablaze at a low level. My aunts flat was on the right hand corner from where were standing. I could see where their windows were and that they were engulfed with fire. I could also see that flats above theirs were also ablaze.

People were still coming out of the tower by 3am but not many. So we still had hope they would be able to get out alive. There was people being sick and throwing up everywhere. I saw a child around the age of 6 unconscious who had been placed under a tree and paramedics were working on them. Police were still trying to push us away they told us to get back and stay back to allow the emergency services access. I could see fireman black and exhausted coming out of the building carrying people. They would hand the people over to paramedics take a drink of water and were going straight back in again.

The third conversation I had was with Hanif at around 3am. Hanif called me and put the family on speaker phone. Hanif said "Afa" (this means sister although they were my cousins I am older and the name is a sign of respect) "We are not going to make it". "We are not going to make it out" Hanif said "I owe you money" I, Hanif my mum and aunt went [REDACTED] the previous September. We had decided to take our mothers whilst they were fit and able to go. Hanif couldn't afford to go so I lent him

Signature: Rohema KHANOM  
2019

Signature witnessed by:



the money. Hanif was apologising that he would never be able to pay me back because he was surrounded by fire. I told him I wasn't bothered about the money. It had been a privilege to have been able to go on [REDACTED] with them. I asked Hanif where everyone was he said "We're all here" Hanif was also apologising for not always being a good brother. I could hear my aunt and uncle in the background reciting from the Quran. I could hear Husna crying. I didn't hear from Hamid at all on this or any of the other phone conversations. In our religion the [REDACTED] if you are aware you are going to pass you ask for forgiveness and say your goodbyes. I told Hanif that I forgave him and realised they probably wouldn't make it out so reluctantly said my goodbyes. I told him to stay low so as not to inhale the smoke. Hanif said I need to go and hung up.

I was frantically calling all their phones but I couldn't get through to any of them. My nephew told me to stop as they might be trying to call me. Husna then called me. This was the last conversation I had Husna she was finding it difficult breathing she was coughing continuously. I said to her you have to get out you have to try. Husna said "I can't, it's so smoky and dark, I can't see anything". That was our last conversation she didn't hang up but she didn't speak to me anymore. I left my phone open and screamed out her name. I continued screaming out her name until my nephew told me to stop he said there was no point. I ducked under the police cordons and run towards the Tower but was stopped by a fireman coming out of the block. I asked a police woman if there was anyone coming out of the building. She spoke on her phone but was unable to give me any information. All I wanted was information about whether the 17<sup>th</sup> floor had been cleared, had any fire officers been to the 17<sup>th</sup> floor. At the time I wasn't happy that no one could give me any information. I wasn't thinking about the magnitude of it and that they didn't know what was going on inside themselves. I hadn't occurred to me that people might not be on their own floors and may be were moving up or down the building attempting to get away from the fire. All I wanted to know was if any of my family had made it out safe.

We waited at the base of the Tower and was still standing there at around 4am, by that time I knew there was no one else coming out alive. It's hard to explain the scene. There were a large number of people standing around in minimal clothing as they were in their night wear.

There was a strange silence I think most people were in a state of shock and didn't know what to do. We couldn't ask the paramedics or fireman anything as they were busy rushing in and out of the tower so

Signature: Rohema KHANOM  
2019

Signature witnessed by:

people left them to do their job. I think the police got it worse from the public as everyone wanted answers which they were unable to give. We were being told to move back to let the emergency services do their work. There were quite a few of us standing around the building however I do not believe the emergency services were hindered by the members of the public standing near the base of the Tower.

Between 4am and 8am I meet up with the rest of my family and stood at the cordon by the bus stop in Latimer Road. We didn't want to go home, we felt helpless and just stood speechless watching the building burn. Survivors from the building went into the Harrow club and waited with their luggage. Whilst standing there I saw stuff falling from the building, I saw cladding falling from the building, there were some large pieces in big shard like strips, others were the size of a mobile phone and A4 size paper. They didn't appear to be hitting anyone just floating down to the ground. Police told us to go home as there was nothing we could do and should get some rest. At around 8am, we decided to leave. Hakim went with our cousin Abdul. There was someone in the Harrow Club taking details of the missing so we went in and gave the details of our family members. Whilst there I received a phone call from my sister to say that the incident was being reported on the TV and that a number of the injured had been taken to hospital but didn't name any.

I went to my mum's home and we spent between 9am and 2pm calling every hospital we could in the London area. After calling the hospital a group of 12 friends and family split up and searched all of the hospital we could think of, even if we didn't believe anyone would have been taken there. We were so desperate for some news. We made posters and put them up everywhere in the hope of some news. We are a private family and wouldn't usually speak with the press but we did in the hope they would be able to help provide us with more information than police were able to give us. We continued through Wednesday and all day and night on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> June with the belief they were all alive in a hospital somewhere but unable to contact us.

We only stopped searching after we were contact by Paula and Lina our police family liaison officers. Myself Hakim and a number of family members gathered at my Cousin Abdul Rahim's address, [REDACTED] on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> July 2017. Paula and Lina introduced themselves to us and explained their role. Our main concern at that time was the whereabouts of our relatives. They explained that everyone who had been taken from Grenfell Tower to hospital had been accounted for and that

Signature: Rohema KHANOM  
2019

Signature witnessed by:

anyone else was missing presumed dead. At first we didn't take this in and asked about the people who were unconscious in hospital who were unable to provide their details to the hospital staff. We were assured that everyone taken to hospital had been accounted for. It took a while for the information to sink in and the realisation there was no hope of any of them having made it out of the fire alive.

Prior to August 2016 my aunt, uncle and cousins were living in a House in Edmonton which was a private rental paid for by Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea council. My family should never have been re-housed on the 14<sup>th</sup> floor of Grenfell Tower and would not have lived there out of choice. The reason they moved there was because sometime in June 2016 they were informed the owner of the property had decided to sell and they had 3 in which to find alternative accommodation. Prior to being rehoused by the council my aunt was sent an assessment form which I helped her to complete. On the assessment form I mentioned that my uncle had suffered a heart attack and a stroke and was unable to manage stairs, although we did state he was able to use a lift.

Around the 23<sup>rd</sup>/24<sup>th</sup> August 2016 my aunt was asked to attend a meeting at Kensington and Chelsea Housing. I remember the day well as I went along with her and Hanif to the Kensington and Chelsea Council housing offices. My aunt requested I go along with them to interpret and support her because I am more assertive and ask more questions than Hanif. We arrived on time for our midday appointment with the reviewing housing officer who saw us after a very long wait. We were taken to a private interview room on the far right. I cannot remember the housing officer's name I think it begun with a C or L, I think her name might be Charlene or Lorna. I would describe her as a black female, late 20's to mid-30's, petite frame, F500 or under, shoulder length hair, well spoken with a London accent. Possibly Caribbean.

The housing officer was a bit taken aback by my presence I think she took my name and I explained the relationship between us and that I was there to interpret for my aunt. The meeting lasted for approximately 1 ½ hrs. my aunt believed the meeting was to discuss her options of properties available for them, however that didn't seem to be the case. She was told that flat 142 Grenfell Tower was available and it appeared the housing officer had all the paperwork ready and produced a letter offering the flat to my aunt stating it met all of their requirements. She expected my aunt to sign and accept the property without seeing it or discussing any other options and appeared annoyed that they didn't just accept it. The

Signature: Rohema KHANOM  
2019

Signature witnessed by:



housing officer told us that the flat was on the 14<sup>th</sup> floor. I challenged the housing officer about placing them on the 14<sup>th</sup> floor as my uncle wouldn't be able to get out of the block if the lifts weren't working. I told her my uncle couldn't walk very far and using the stairs was almost impossible for him. She didn't really want to discuss anything with me as I wasn't the one who would be living in the property. I was there for my aunt to help her so I tried to argue the point that they had a duty of care to the elderly resident to house them safely. As my uncle couldn't manage the stairs I asked what would happen in the event of an emergency. The housing officer reminded us that we had completed the assessment form stating that he could use a lift. My aunt told her that the circumstances had changed as my uncle had had another stroke since completing the last application. She asked why they would be moved from a first floor flat to the 14<sup>th</sup> floor knowing he was so ill. It hadn't really occurred to me at the time that the emergency may be a fire. I was thinking more on the lines that my uncle was a very unwell man and wondered what would happen if he were to have another heart attack or stroke. How would the Paramedics be able to reach him quickly? Equally they wouldn't be able to carry him down 14 flights of stairs as the staircase was narrow and my uncle was a big man. My aunt explained that my uncle needed a ground floor flat due to his ill health. My uncle could manage a few flights of stairs, it took him 20 mins to climb four flights of stairs on the rare occasion he visited my mother's home with my aunt. He was a heavy and unwell man who could only walk very slowly with the aid of a walking stick. There is no way he would have been able to make it down 14 flights of stairs on a normal day let alone in the event of a fire.

I only found out the flat was on the 17<sup>th</sup> floor when Husna collected the keys to go to the flat. She got off on the 14<sup>th</sup> floor and couldn't find 142. She continued up floor by floor, till on the 17<sup>th</sup> and found their flat. The floor numbers were not clearly marked.

I am sure my aunt asked at this meeting what would happen in the event of a fire. The housing officer did mention during the meeting that the accommodation would only be temporary. I asked why they couldn't find a permanent place which she said wasn't an option at this stage. Hanif protested about being housed on the 17<sup>th</sup> floor he said they would take something smaller and anywhere just to be on a lower floor. They were not making any demand about where they were to be housed just somewhere appropriate for my uncle's needs. The housing officer wasn't at all sympathetic to my uncle's needs, his ill health wasn't taken into consideration. They were told there wasn't any other properties available for a family of five

Signature: Rohema KHANOM  
2019

Signature witnessed by:

and that flat 142 Grenfell Tower was their only option. The Housing officer threatened that this would be their last offer. The council wasn't obliged to house Hanif, Hamid and Husna as they were adult now and if they didn't accept the offer they would be intentionally making themselves homeless. If they turned down the offer of 142 Grenfell Tower the council would not find another accommodation and would only rehouse my aunt and uncle. My aunt was really worried that her family would be split and concerned that my cousins wouldn't have anywhere to live.

I felt the housing officer was bullying my aunt into accepting the offer. Hanif thought the housing officer was being really harsh on his mother and was upset they were not even given the option of being able to view the inside the property before making their decision. Although feeling very distraught and bullied my aunt would not accept the offer until she had discussed it with my uncle. After a long discussion the housing officer agreed that they would have 24 hrs to make a decision and complete the forms.

They came to the conclusion they had no other option if they wanted to keep the family together. Husna came to my house for help with completing the acceptance forms. My aunt returned the following day with Hanif to the housing offices and reluctantly accepted the flat. I believe she only accepted Grenfell because the flat in Edmonton would be sold whilst she would at [REDACTED] and didn't want to worry about her husband being made homeless during that time. ([REDACTED] we were attending in Saudi Arabia, my aunt was going with me Hanif and my mum between 7<sup>th</sup> September and 27<sup>th</sup> September 2016). We hadn't mentioned this to the housing officer at the time.

It hadn't really occurred to me at the time that the emergency may be a fire. I was thinking more on the lines that my uncle was a very unwell man and wondered what would happen if he were to have another heart attack or stroke. How would the Paramedics be able to reach him quickly? Equally they wouldn't be able to carry him down 14 flights of stairs as the staircase was narrow and my uncle was a big man. My aunt explained that my uncle needed a ground floor flat due to his ill health.

When we were in Bangladesh in April 2016 there was a fire in the village where all the residents survived, these home were 2 storeys at the most. This bothered my aunt she mentioned the fact that a number of times to me both whilst we were away and when I visited her after she had moved in. The

Signature: Rohema KHANOM  
2019

Signature witnessed by:

thought of moving to a high rise building really frightened her. She once said to me “We are so far up, this building will be the death of me”.

I have no idea about any health and safety policies in connection with the Tower. The flat did have a fire alarm in the kitchen. This was tested by the fire brigade on the 10<sup>th</sup> June 2017. I know this because I was there at the flat whilst the test was being carried out I could hear the fire alarm in the kitchen. Husna told me she had to sign something to say they had attended. I don't recall there being a building fire alarm and have never heard one being tested. I didn't hear one sounding on the night of the fire. I remember there was a fire extinguisher adjacent to the lift on the 17<sup>th</sup> floor but I don't believe there were any other fire safety measures. There were big painted steel pipes on show in the hallway which lead into flats

I would describe the property as an open plan 3 bedroom flat, with separate bathroom and toilet. The standard inside the flat did not match that of the expensive looking exterior. There was a gas connection but it wasn't working for around 4 months between Oct 2016 and Feb 2016 they were therefore unable to use the gas cooker and had to use a table top electric hob and oven. The sink was falling off in the bathroom it was disgusting and mouldy and they didn't have hot water for a couple of months. My aunt said the flats on her side of the block both up and down were experiencing the same problems. There were no fire doors and I don't remember the kitchen door shutting properly. Husna made a number of complaints and a further assessment form was sent out early October. My aunt brought it to me with my uncle's medication and I completed it for her . I don't know if they received a response. Husna made two videos of the interior of flat 142 and the exterior of the building which she to me and I have forwarded copies of these to Lina. I exhibit these videos as RRK/01 and RRK/02. I also exhibit notes I made prior to making my statement as RRK/03

Signature: Rohema KHANOM  
2019

Signature witnessed by: