

IN THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT

OF

AHMED CHELLAT

Introduction

1. I am the above-named person and I reside at [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] I have lived here with my family for over 30 years.
2. I make this statement in relation to the fire at Grenfell Tower last year, where my brother-in-law Abdul Aziz, his wife Fouzia and their three children Yasin, Nurhuda and Mahdi died.
3. The facts and matters set out in this witness statement are within my own knowledge, unless otherwise stated, and are true to the best of my knowledge and belief. Where I refer to information supplied by others, the source of the information is identified. Facts and matters derived from other sources are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Background

4. My wife Ghita and I have three children. They are [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. My eldest children live with me. I also have three grandchildren. My family and I have lived near Grenfell tower for the last 30 years.
5. My wife, Ghita Chellat, is the eldest sister of Abdul Aziz who, together with his wife, Fouzia and their three children Yasin, Nurhuda and Mahdi, died in the Grenfell fire on 14th June. They lived in flat 182 on the 21st floor, where they had lived for nearly 20 years. My family and I were extremely close to Abdul Aziz and his family. Having lived so close to each other for the majority of our lives, Abdul Aziz and Fouzia would visit us, and vice versa, on a weekly and often daily or nearly-daily basis. My wife and I helped to raise their children. We were an incredibly close-knit family. We considered Fouzia and the children as part of our own family. Our children were also similarly very tight-knit; they were friends.

The fire on 14th June 2017

6. On the night of the fire, Ghita was attending to her elderly sick mother who lived nearby on [REDACTED] I was at our flat, having my last supper. I was in the kitchen when I heard the sound of sirens. I looked out of my kitchen window and I heard the sound of emergency services. I rushed to my bedroom window to get a better look and, when I realised it was in fact Grenfell tower, I rushed to wake my children and to get to the tower immediately. As I was leaving my flat, I realised I did not have anyone's phone numbers on me. My son [REDACTED] hurried to the scene and my daughter and I tried to call Henan and our other family members. There was no reply. We kept trying until Henan picked up the third time. Henan informed us she and her family were safe but that Abdul Aziz was still inside. She told us to meet her outside the Methodist Church. At this point, my daughter, grandson and I rushed out and met Henan and her family outside, near the Methodist Church.
7. When we arrived, it was chaotic. We could hear the sounds of people inside the tower. People were screaming and crying outside.
8. At this point, the fire had not yet reached Abdul Aziz's flat. We continued to frantically call them. The police, however, arrived and moved us to the nearby Kensington Sports Centre. There we met other members of the family, including Amina, Assia, their daughters and [REDACTED]. We called Fouzia together. When I spoke to her, she seemed calm. She informed us Abdul Aziz had been on the 'phone to the fire services, who advised them to remain in the flat and not to leave. She believed that help was coming to them. I told them to quickly leave the flat. Several minutes later, when we rang Fouzia again, she explained that they were advised to move to a different room and close the doors as there was smoke sweeping through the main door and the gaps in the window frames. They were told to get blankets and cover themselves on the floor in this room. Fouzia's voice was becoming increasingly distressed. I had seen Abdul Aziz at the window, waving for help. The telephone contact with Fouzia was eventually lost. This was the last time I saw Abdul Aziz.
9. The Portobello Rugby Club was open at this point and we were all asked to move in there by the police. There was however no one inside; nobody we could seek advice and information in relation to the fire and what help and assistance was provided to those who remained inside. We still had some hope.
10. There were however rumours circulating at this point about the fire generally and Fouzia and the rest of the family, in particular. There was a tense, frenzied environment

with people searching for and frantically calling loved ones. We kept hearing different accounts from people.

11. I went to find my wife Ghita at her mother's flat and told her that her brother and his family still remained inside. At first, Ghita fainted with shock and later was too upset to speak or cry. We were all lost for words. We eventually lost hope when people stopped leaving and the fire engulfed the upper floors.
12. My wife came to the scene later that morning as she was too traumatised to come immediately. We did not want her to come, [REDACTED]
When she arrived, someone said the El-Wahabi's are all dead. Upon looking at the scene of the fire and the smouldering building which was still on fire in places she suffered a further collapse.
13. My children had urged me to go back to our flat for morning prayers at this point as I had been up all morning. When I arrived back at our flat, I noticed the TV had been on from the night before. To my horror, I saw my wife collapsed on TV with my son [REDACTED] attempting to prevent photographers and cameras from trying to get a shot. A police officer threatened my son with arrest for doing this. I rushed back to the scene.
14. When I arrived back to the scene, my wife was lying on the floor, with a doctor treating her.

Confirmation of death

15. The deaths of Abdul Aziz, Fouzia and their three children were confirmed to the family a week after the fire by Family Liaison Officers who met with Amina, Amin and Hamid, Abdul Aziz and my wife's siblings.

Aftermath and Impact

16. Since the fire Ghita has felt too upset to speak about the tragedy without breaking down. She has found it difficult to continue normal day to day duties especially as our flat is within walking distance of Grenfell tower and she can see the burnt tower from her bedroom window. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
17. [REDACTED]

18. Our [REDACTED] year old grandson, [REDACTED] also witnessed the burning tower and is aware that his aunt, uncle and cousins died in the fire. He has been deeply affected [REDACTED] and is afraid to sleep alone.
19. [REDACTED]
20. I have been an active member of my local community, having been a member of the Grenfell tower TMO until 8 years ago. I have previously worked as an advice worker and interpreter and continue to provide voluntary support to local residents. I am also an active member of various local initiatives organised by the Moroccan Embassy.
21. Since the fire, I have helped many survivors and local residents' access support services. In particular, I have assisted Moroccan nationals to obtain support from the Moroccan embassy. I have also assisted with the repatriation of bodies back to Morocco for burial arrangements. I am also actively involved in a number of local Grenfell support groups and I have regularly been interviewed by local and national media operations.


The Inquiry

22. My family and I are gravely distressed by the allegations concerning the use of low-quality cladding throughout the building, and the part that this economy may have played in causing the spread of the fire from the fourth all the way to the 21st floor, resulting in our family's death.
23. We wish to also ask questions regarding the immediate response of fire services to the incident, especially their instructions to Abdul Aziz and Fouzia to remain in the flat, which denied Abdul Aziz and his family a chance to escape.

Statement of truth

I believe the facts and matters stated in this witness statement are true.

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

Signed.....

Dated22-5-18.....