

IN THE MATTER OF THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

STATEMENT OF AZIZA BOUDAFCHA

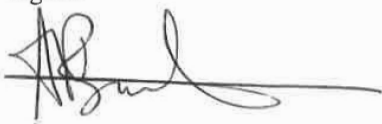
Preamble

1. This statement is made from my own personal knowledge and from matters that I have been told about by others; where the information does not come from my own personal knowledge, I make this clear below.
2. In this statement I focus upon my background - living on the Lancaster West estate and most particularly, the events of 14 June 2017. I also wish to provide evidence to the Inquiry regarding the failures of the authorities in their response to the disaster. I will provide a further statement regarding those aspects when the Inquiry make a call for this evidence. In the event that the Inquiry seeks oral evidence from me in relation to both phases of the Inquiry; I have no objection to giving evidence on more than one occasion.
3. I have not provided a statement to the police. Other than an interview of about 30 seconds broadcast on - I believe, BBC1 - I have not made any public statement regarding the Grenfell Tower disaster. The interview on BBC1 related to the aftermath and not the events of 14 June 2017.
4. I knew many people who lived in the Tower to say 'hello' as we passed by one another but I knew the El Wahabi family well: Faouzia and Abdulaziz El Wahabi and their children, Yasin, Nur Huda and Mehdi who died in the fire. I also knew Rania Ibrahim [REDACTED] and Steven Power who I often saw about the estate as he walked his dogs.
5. I make this statement because I was a resident of Grenfell Walk at the time of the fire and I was evacuated from my home in the early hours of 14 June 2017. My children and I lost our home, our community and our possessions as a result of the fire.

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Aziza Boudafcha

Signed:



Dated:

4-4-18

Personal background

6. [REDACTED]
7. I have 5 children:
- a. Abdurrahman Sarumi [REDACTED]
 - b. Abdullah Sarumi [REDACTED]
 - c. Safar Sarumi [REDACTED]
 - d. [REDACTED]
 - e. [REDACTED]
8. As I make this statement in April 2018, my children and I are still living in temporary accommodation.

[REDACTED] Grenfell Walk

9. I moved into [REDACTED] Grenfell Walk in 1980 when I was 7 years old with my mum, my dad, my 2 brothers and my 2 sisters. I am the second eldest in my family.
10. [REDACTED] is located at the western edge of Grenfell Walk, it is the closest of the Walk flats to Latimer Road Underground Station. The Tower lies immediately opposite [REDACTED] and the Tower are so close in fact that I have had conversations from inside my flat with friends inside the Tower. The ramp that leads from the station to the Tower is at the same level [REDACTED]
11. [REDACTED] is a maisonette. I understand it to be one of only two 5-bedroom homes on the entire Lancaster West estate. The maisonette is laid out with 3 bedrooms, a kitchen, and a bathroom on the ground floor; and downstairs is two more bedrooms, a front room, separate bath and shower rooms.
12. As we grew up we played "knock down ginger" in the Tower. At that time there was an entrance to the Tower at the front and the rear; we ran into the Tower from the front and out at the back.

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13. We grew up and flew the nest, my father passed away, and it became just my mum and my two brothers living at [REDACTED]. The tenancy passed from my father to my mother when he died. By 2010 my five kids and I had been living in a 2-bed flat for some time and we had been on the waiting list for a 5 bedroom flat for a long time. My mum and I decided to organise a flat swap. We processed this through the council and it took a few months to sort out. I moved back to [REDACTED] in June 2013. So, although at the time of the fire I had been living at [REDACTED] for 4 years, I have known Grenfell and the Lancaster West estate almost all my life.
14. When I moved back - nothing seemed to me to have changed. It seemed everyone who was living there when I was a kid was still there. The young people I grew up with had gone on to have their own kids and my kids became friends with their kids; it was just as I had always known it. As we grew up we had known all the "oldies" and they had known us; we helped them with their shopping and things like that. When I moved back in I was now an "oldie" and my friends' kids helped me with my shopping and called me "Auntie". We saw it all pass on; it was the cycle of life playing out there. We were living our lives there but the fire cut all that short.
15. My family and I had all our memories in [REDACTED]; memories of my father; of my brothers and sisters growing up with him; of my own children's birthdays; of [REDACTED] organising a [REDACTED] birthday party for Safar in 2016; of the gatherings I organised there once a month with food and dressing up; of the big front room full of people; the balcony overlooking the park and the big patio at the front with the marquee up and food on the barbecue. We had happy times.
16. The community and the estate provided for my children: [REDACTED] and Abdurrahman and Abdullah used the gym to practice Ju Jitsu and they played football in the Westway Centre.
17. My sister, Fatima Boudafcha lived about 5 minutes away and she was at [REDACTED] all the time. She had been my dad's carer before he passed. After I moved back in, Fatima often ended up just staying the night with us. We had plenty of room.

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18. Because I grew up in Grenfell Walk, I knew the whole community. I was often late for work because it would take me 15 minutes to get the short distance from my front door to my car through saying hello to everybody. I was just living my life.
19. Before the fire, I worked 40 hours a week as the [REDACTED] of a humanitarian organisation, [REDACTED].
[REDACTED] On the weekends I also worked as an [REDACTED] – just to make ends meet. I was a working single mother of five kids, so the routine and the structure of that routine were incredibly important. I wanted to make sure that as a mother I got up, worked, provided and set a good example. Safar, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] The school was so close; they could be there in 30 seconds. The teenagers had their own keys. When the younger kids got home they would always contact me at work to say that they were home and I would be home within an hour or so. Abdurrahman was working at [REDACTED] and Abdullah had yet to make his plans. They all had their own TVs, iPads, computers. I would come home with the food shopping, I would cook, we would all eat together, and they would go back to their rooms to study or just chill. My habit was to park my car at KAA and walk home with the shopping for dinner. On an ordinary day; my routine was to get the youngest ones into bed by about 8.30-9pm and I would then have the evening to myself.
20. Community is where you live your life; it is everything that is not inside your house. We had a happy life in that community.

13 June 2017

21. On 13 June 2017 I parked the car as usual at KAA at about 5:30 pm. As I made my way to my flat I walked past Nur Huda El Wahabi who was playing football. She said, "*Stop, stop let auntie go past*" in Arabic and she offered to help me with my shopping. I said, "*No I'm alright*" and I asked after her mum.
22. As this was Ramadan, when I got home I cooked for my youngest two children only as they were too young to fast. After they had eaten, I made harira (Moroccan soup) for *iftar*, the meal that would break our fast after sun down. The harira takes about 2 hours



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to cook and after it was prepared I put it on the hob to cook slowly. I made a big pot that evening to last for a couple of days. It's not permitted to smoke during fasting; so I needed to keep myself occupied. That evening my sister Fatima was with me and a friend Halima at [REDACTED]. Although they had already eaten the little ones joined us for a second meal, so, we broke fast with all five kids and Fatima and Halima at about 9pm. After that we cleaned up for a bit. I put the youngest two to bed. I needed a cigarette, so I took my coffee and cigarette downstairs to my room.

23. After the meal, Safar went to her room to study as she had a Maths A Level exam the next day. I went into her room and said, "*Try to get some sleep, you've got school the next day*". She said, "*I've got an exam in the morning, I need to study*". During Ramadan I often stayed up until sunrise when the fast started again; as it was so early in the morning it wasn't worth going to sleep. Safar said she was going to try to relax and stay up until we had eaten *suhr* (the pre-dawn meal before the fast begins again) at about 3am.
24. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were asleep in bed. I took a shower and got into bed. I had a TV at the foot of my bed, so, I lay in bed watching TV and chilling. I set an alarm for 3am just in case I fell asleep. I had no reason to think that night was going to be anything unusual.
25. Fatima left the house after the meal with the plan to return [REDACTED]. Halima was staying with us that night.

14 June 2017

First awareness

26. I must have fallen asleep because I was woken by Abdurrahman and Safar barging through into my bedroom. I believe I must have fallen asleep around 11.30pm and I would estimate that it was just after midnight when they came into my room. They were shouting, "*There's a fire! There's a fire!*" I had been deeply asleep. I thought they meant our house. I was thinking about the kitchen. I started panicking. As I jumped out of my bed in my pyjamas, I was saying, "*Where's the fire? Where's the fire?*" and they said, "*No, it's the Tower. The Tower is on fire*". Abdullah was also awake and talking to us.

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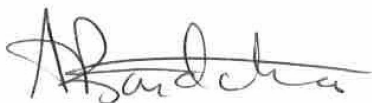
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27. Two months before that – while I was visiting my cousin who lives beside Trellick Tower – there had been a fire in one flat of that Tower. We had gone out to see what was going on. The fire stayed in that single flat on about the 23rd floor. It did not spread. Everyone was evacuated, the firemen came and extinguished the fire, and everyone was allowed to go back inside, right away, that same night. I expected the same thing to happen when my kids told me there was a fire in Grenfell – that it would be in a single flat and it would stay in a single flat. I was worrying about whose flat it might be.
28. I grabbed a headscarf and a long green jacket. My headscarf was just thrown on. My jacket was over my pyjamas. The pyjamas were blue with tiny white polka dots. I put on my navy blue Nike trainers. Abdullah, Abdurrahman and Safar and I decided to go out to look; we did not discuss this, we just wanted to help; that's our first instinct. Halima came out of [REDACTED] with us also.

First observation of the fire

29. When I came out of the flat the tower block was directly in front of me. I was expecting to see one flat with smoke. I could see people inside the Tower. I tried to register what I could see. I registered that there was more than one flat affected by the fire. My attention was drawn to the side of the Tower that faces the school which was not visible to me from where I stood. I mean the north side of the Tower. I could see loads of smoke and fire coming from that north side. The fire and smoke were coming around that side to the west side; the side facing the park. What made me realise that it was more than one flat was I could see fire and smoke from the bottom to the top but I could not see the source of the fire. I went, “*Oh my gosh, oh my god, allah akbar*” and I put my hands on my head. I thought, “*This is not for real*”. The fire coming around the side of the Tower from north to west was orange and there was smoke. I could hear “*boof*” “*boom*” as if there were explosions going off. I heard those sounds each time the fire reached another floor. I guessed that the fire was smashing the windows – that is what I assumed the sound was but it might have been something else; maybe the sound was of electrical appliances exploding. The fire was not consistently orange. It was a heavy fire; a burning, heavy fire. The smoke is difficult to describe because it was dark; it was a kind of grey but dark. I was trying to work out what could possibly have caused that sort of fire. It wasn't so much blowing about at this stage. I could smell the fire – it wasn't just smoke that I could



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smell, it was a smell of burning plastic or something like that. It was a really horrible smell.

30. I focused on the people within the Tower who were screaming for help. I was now standing just to the east of [REDACTED] The people I saw were on the west side of the Tower. These people were:

- a. There was a lady - I would estimate she was in her fifties. She was at her window. I was standing with a neighbour called Jackie at this time. We were both screaming, crying and shouting at the Tower. We shouted, "*We are getting you help. The fire brigade are here. The police are here. There is help here*". She was calling out "*Help, help*" and we were replying. She was waving her arms above her head. Jackie and I stayed there to try and reassure her. People were running to inform the emergency services. This lady was not wearing anything on her head. I do not recall what colour her hair was but my memory is that her hair was quite thin and in a bob shape. I looked up towards her. The best estimation I can give is that she was on the 6th or 7th floor. She was a white woman; perhaps European.
- b. My attention was also drawn to a guy with a flashlight that I think was from his phone. He was quite high up, I would say higher than half way up. I could see the flashing of the light. We were also shouting at him. There came a time when I could not see him or the flashlight and I could see smoke coming from his flat. This was about an hour after I had first come out of my home.
- c. There were other people at their windows but I cannot recall any details about them now.

31. We were shouting to the emergency services, "*Where are the ladders, where are them inflatable things so people can jump*". It looked to me that people wanted to jump. There was a helicopter overhead circulating.

32. So many people were running and so many were shouting. I remember some Muslim men who I refer to as 'brothers' shouting, "*turn on all the taps*", "*open your taps*", "*tie bedsheets*". I saw bedsheets coming down on the south side of the Tower. I ran to the east side of the Tower and I ran back. I was running around like a headless chicken. I was up and down the Walk - shouting.

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Aziza Boudafcha

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33. I saw two men on the first floor calling out for help. Fire fighters came with a ladder. The ladder was quite long and was leant from the south side entrance to the first floor of the Tower or thereabouts¹. Two men from the same flat came out of that flat, down the ladder and they were saved.
34. The police, the fire services, the ambulance were all saying to those of us who had come out of our flats, *"We're doing our best, you have to move back"*. We were saying *"You're not getting what we're telling you, there's people there"*. We felt we needed to be there. We were telling them what was happening and we were talking to the people in the Tower.

How the fire spread

35. People had their hands on their heads, looking up at the Tower. As I ran to and fro I realised that the east side of the Tower had caught fire and I could now hear explosions on that side as well. The fire climbed the building floor by floor. As it spread round the building it climbed up the Tower so fast. It was impossible to take in. It started to catch on the 4th or 5th floor, one of the lower floors. Then it climbed to the next one, there would be an explosion and then it would climb to the next one. I could hear tearing and explosions. I could see the cladding above us falling down. Things falling everywhere. I thought, *"Oh my god, this is not for real. Not real."* I was in shock. I took pictures on my phone, I felt like I was in a movie. I've never seen anything like that in my life.
36. I saw Hanan, her husband, and my neighbours. I was crying. It was exhausting. The south side of the building was now on fire. The fire ripped up the south side so quickly I could not handle watching that.
37. I saw police running up the stairs and knocking on the doors to Grenfell Walk. They were in uniform and had body cameras. They started on the far side of Grenfell Walk, and some came over to us. They were saying, *"Get back in your homes"*. Abdurrahman was shouting, *"People are dying, they need help."* There was two male and one female officer. They were trying to push us in but Abdurrahman objected. The police officer said

¹ I mean what was the first floor before the refurbishment.



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"I've got you on camera. I'm recording you." My son was saying *"Don't push me, don't touch me"*. The police officer replied, *"We're telling you for your own safety."*

38. The police ushered us into [REDACTED] but we went back out onto the patio. Again, the police told us to get back inside. We had a glass window in the front door so we looked out through it. Then we came back outside again on to the Walk and continued talking to the people on the west side of the Tower and saying things like, *"hold on in there – help is coming"*.

We are told to evacuate [REDACTED] Grenfell Walk

39. Then the police banged on our door, shouting *"Get out now!"* They told us that we needed to get out and they started barging into the house. My youngest two children, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were still asleep. Abdurrahman was very frustrated with the police, saying *"My mum's not dressed"* – he was referring to the fact that I did not have my headscarf on. I wrapped a scarf around me and went to grab some stuff. The police said *"Don't take anything, put a jacket on and go"* and so we grabbed our coats, shoes and left. I grabbed my children's coats and said *"Safar, the cat!"* Safar grabbed the cat and put her inside her coat.
40. The police told us, *"Go down the slope and get out of here"*. Instead we stood on the landing of Grenfell Walk that is on the ramp to the west of Hurstway Walk. I was standing on the ramp just beside the railway tracks at that point from that view I decided to record what I could see of the Tower on my phone. I was standing with Safar and Abdurrahman.

41. [REDACTED]



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42. As we went down the ramp; it was the first time that my youngest two had seen the Tower on fire. When he saw this, [REDACTED] fell to the floor, hysterically crying. I have never seen my son behave like that; not even when he was a toddler. Abdurrahman said, "*Fix up, bruv*". He meant "*get up from the floor*" as if it was embarrassing. I said to Abdurrahman "*Leave your brother alone*". Abdurrahman was complaining that unlike others we had not packed – we saw people leaving with suitcases containing their belongings - he was in shock. We went to the area just before the Rugby Portabello Club. People were calling out about their relatives who were in the Tower. I remember someone saying, "*My dad! I can't find my dad! My dad's still in there!*"
43. I saw a group of local brothers about 5 – 7 of them go to a police van and take the shields out of the back. They were behaving as if they were warriors; as if they could do something. They shouted "*We're going in!*" and then they ran towards the Tower.
44. We went to the road where the Latimer Road station bus stop is. I took a video of the Tower from this perspective also and this is also produced to me as "AB/2". It was now 03:30.
45. My daughter had the cat in her coat, I remember its head popping out at the collar. We sat on the road. I felt traumatised. There were lots of people looking for each other. My phone was going mad – people calling to ask if I was okay. I was telling them "*Yeah – everyone's out, everyone's safe.*" We sat on the street – looking homeless. My scarf was half on my head. I had all of my kids together. We were hoping to hear good news, hoping that everyone we knew was safe. Everyone was frantic, crying. We were all in shock.
46. Word spread that there was a number at the Rugby Portabello centre to call for help. I got hold of the number and called it, and there was an automated message saying that the offices were closed until 9.30am.
47. I called back at 10am that morning and spoke to a woman who took my information and said she would call me back. By 12 midday my motherly instinct kicked in and I started thinking "*What are we going to do? What's the plan?*" The Westway Centre had been opened up by that time. I was in slippers because I had swapped my shoes with [REDACTED] I must have looked so funny, looking back, but at the time I didn't think or care about what I was wearing. I ran down to the Westway centre and told them that I



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had 5 children and that we were homeless. At 6 pm they called me and said that they had found us a hotel. My car was parked at the KAA but I was told that it was too dangerous to get the car – it took 3 weeks to get it back, it was towed out eventually. I had no bank cards, no money, no car so we had to walk to the place we were allocated - [REDACTED] in Earls Court. They allocated us two rooms, so me and the 3 youngest were in one room and the two eldest were in another.

Exhibits

48. There is now produced and shown to me referred to as [REDACTED] [REDACTED] “AB/2”, the [REDACTED] pieces of video recorded to my mobile phone at [REDACTED] 03:30 (see above at [REDACTED] §44 respectively).

Statement of Truth

I confirm that the content of this witness statement is true.

I confirm that 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:



Date:

4.4.18

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Aziza Boudafcha

Signed:

Dated:



4.4.18