

## GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

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### FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF DAVID O'CONNELL

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I, David O'Connell of [REDACTED] Barandon Walk London W11 [REDACTED] will say as follows:

#### Background

1. I am Viviana Rullo's partner. I have lived at the above property for around 5 years which is marked on **Exhibit DO1 as Figure 1**. I was with Viviana on the night of the fire. My statement should be read in conjunction with hers. I have lived in this area for around 10 years. [REDACTED] Barandon Walk is part of the Lancaster West Estate. It is located south of Grenfell Tower. Barandon Walk, Testerton Walk and Hurstway are known as the 'walkways'. Because of the curve in the Barandon Walk building, when you look out of our kitchen and bedroom windows, the south façade of the tower and the south eastern corner is directly in view.

#### Night of fire

2. I remember that the evening of the fire was really warm. It was a Tuesday. We did not do much after work, we just watched a bit of television, had dinner at home and then went to bed. I am a deep sleeper. I remember being woken by Viviana saying that the tower was on fire. I remember looking at the digital clock on the kitchen on the cooker and it showing 15 minutes past, I am not sure of the hour.
3. I got up and went into the kitchen and I then went out onto the balcony through our kitchen door. From the balcony, the southern aspect of Grenfell Tower is clearly visible. It is also possible to see the south-eastern corner. We watched the fire for a while from the balcony. I must have been sleepy as

I could not figure out whether the fire was travelling up or down the building. I remember thinking it looked like the fire in the film, *The Towering Inferno*. At the time I thought that it was the south-eastern corner on fire, which was the one closest to us, but I now know that the fire travelled up the north-eastern corner of the building. Even though it is not possible to see that corner of the building in daylight, in the dark I am sure that we could see the glow of the fire travel up the building.

4. I could hear the sound of helicopters circling, and then I realised that I could hear people trapped in the tower screaming for help. I was shocked by this as because of the ferocity of the flames I had assumed at first that no one was still in the tower and it had been evacuated. When I realised there were people still inside I remember feeling physically unwell. I came back into the kitchen and had to sit down on the sofa. Then I said to Viviana, we need to get dressed and get out of here.
5. We got dressed really quickly and without taking much with us, we left the building through the main entrance shown on **Exhibit DO1** as **Figure 2**. When we got outside there were residents gathered at the bottom of the walkway which leads to the main entrance of Barandon Walk, their location is marked at **Exhibit DO1, Figure 3**. We could see that people had gone down further to the bottom of the garden. We followed them there, even though I was thinking that possibly it wasn't the safest place to be due to the proximity to the tower.
6. As I was walking down the garden, I remember seeing something drop from a window and not being sure if it was a person jumping out. I am not sure exactly where in the tower it came from.
7. We stood at the point marked as **Figure 4 on Exhibit DO1**. From where we were standing, you could clearly see the people trapped inside the tower, standing at the windows. They were calling down to us and we were trying to reassure them. They were screaming out what floor they were on. We were asking people's names and saying, don't worry, the fire brigade are coming,

stay there. They could hear us. A neighbour that I was standing with was asking what floor they were on. One of the men who was trapped replied and shouting down his floor number. I remember seeing a guy in the window which was filled with smoke. His window was in the middle of the South Façade of the tower. He might have been in flat 32 or 33 but I am not sure.

8. On the floor below, there were a family with 2 children and a mother. They were coming up to the window every so often and then going and coming back again.
9. I remember another person standing at their window on the southern facade. It looked as though they had smashed the glass to let some air in. Their net curtains were blowing out through the broken window.
10. I could see fire brigades' hoses from where we were standing. The water from the hoses reached up to approximately the twelfth floor. It seemed as though where the water had reached the flames, the hoses were working in controlling the fire though I was more focussed on what the fire was doing than watching the fire brigade's efforts. I could not see the fire engines from where we were standing. I assume that they had gone along Grenfell Road to the south eastern corner of the tower. If that is where they were, then they would have been blocked from our view by the Grenfell Walk and the Barandon Walk buildings. It seemed that the fire engines couldn't get close enough to the tower on southern facade to fight the blaze effectively. I say this because my perception was that their hoses did not reach up high enough to stop the spread of the fire.
11. The cladding on the building was on fire. The lines between the cladding panels were half way up between each floor. The fire seemed to be leaping up panel by panel. As each one caught fire, there was a sound like 'poof' almost as though they were exploding. I could hear the sound of the fire crackling. I presume that this was the cladding. At one point, a huge chunk of burning debris fell into the garden. Loads of people jumped on it and started putting it out. Another piece landed on my head. It was maybe 1 square

metre in size, and quite light so it didn't hurt. It seemed like polystyrene foam. I couldn't think why a material like that would be on a building.

12. Whilst all of this was happening, Viviana was taking pictures and videos of the fire, and tweeting where the trapped people were located in the building. I didn't call emergency services; it was clear to me that they were already aware of what was happening.
13. At around the time that the fire crossed the top of the southern facade, the flames became much fiercer and the fire seemed to accelerate in its spread. We heard a banging noise which was police going through rapidly the flats in the walkways kicking the doors in to evacuate people. It seemed that this was in response to the ferocity of the fire. I presume that they thought the whole tower was about to collapse.
14. We could see thick black smoke coming off the building. The wind was blowing the smoke away from us.
15. People were screaming and shouting from the top of the building. The sound carries very clearly in the estate, because the walkways are enclosed and so sound bounces off the surrounding buildings. I remember that when the fire reached the top of the tower, it went across the roof of the tower very quickly. There must have been people in flats on the top floor who were screaming, because after the fire crossed the top of the building, everything went quiet.
16. We stood there until 5am. By that time, it had got light, and the sun had come up. We came back towards the main entrance of Barandon Walk to see if we could re-enter the building as we were exhausted and wanted to rest. Police officers were standing in front of the walkway and would not allow us to enter. We were stuck outside. We could see that the lights in our flat were on, and we knew that the front door was not locked and our cats were still in there.
17. I was dazed. I remember that the brothers from a mosque were handing out bottles of water and rich tea biscuits. We sat outside for a while and then

decided to go to get something to eat in the embassy cafe. Later we went to Clement James Church but no-one knew what was happening so I went to my office by Westfield shopping centre with Viviana to use the internet.

18. I didn't know any of the people who died that night well, but when flowers and photographs were put up, I recognised the people shown in the pictures from around the area. This is a really unusual part of London, as everyone knows each other. Families have lived here for generations. I know Eddie Daffarn from the Residents Association and was relieved that he made it out of the tower.
19. The fire and its aftermath have had a devastating impact on our lives and I would like to have the opportunity to make a further statement about this in due course.

**I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.**

Signed:

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Dated.

18.05.2018

