

**Witness Statement of: Dougal Steward**

**No. of statement: 1**

**Exhibits:**

**Date of statement: 4 June 2018**

**GRENFELL TOWER PUBLIC INQUIRY**

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**WITNESS STATEMENT OF DOUGAL STEWARD**

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I, DOUGAL STEWARD, will say as follows:

1. I make this statement about the events of the night of 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017 for the purposes of Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry. I wish to make a further statement as part of Phase 2 of the Inquiry.

Background

1. I live at [REDACTED] Hurstway Walk. I have lived here since 1994. My wife Angel moved in with me in 2004. Angel's full name is Angelica Cassi Damaso-Steward
2. My flat is on the second floor and it has one bedroom. There is a balcony which you can access from the living room which looks out onto Testerton Walk. There is a garden with trees in between my flat and Testerton Walk. You can see Grenfell Tower from my balcony; I think the Tower is probably about 200 metres away.
3. I am self employed and I am currently working as a 'man with a van'. When I don't work I don't get paid.

### The Estate Management Board

4. I used to be on the Estate Management Board (EMB). I was on the EMB for about five years. It was like an upgraded residents association with membership from the council, the residents and the TMO. It was sanctioned by the Home Secretary at the time. The EMB was supposed to work in conjunction with the TMO. The other parties were only interested in trying to save money. They weren't interested in what we had to say or in trying to change things for the better in the estate. I was asked to step down in the end because they didn't want me to voice an opinion. I was happy to go; it felt like I was banging my head against a brick wall. I wanted to keep a low profile for a while.
5. In the end the EMB failed to reach quorum so it stopped meeting. People stopped turning up for meetings and didn't want to carry on being members. This was all before the school was built.
6. As residents, the council and the TMO didn't want to hear what we had to say. We came away from that thinking that we can't do anything. It was like what ever way you turned, nobody would listen.

### The TMO Association

7. After the EMB, they had the TMO Association. Everyone from the estate was a member. Since then they had the school which went up, they did a consultation but not really, it was already going to happen, regardless of the outcome of the consultation. People opposed the school but it went up anyway.
8. They redid the leisure centre and took away all the parking, tennis and football courts. It was a prime piece of land but now we have no parking, tennis courts, football pitches or anything.

9. They were talking about knocking Grenfell Tower down but it turned out that it would be more costly than renovating it. Fundamentally, there was nothing wrong with the structure of the building; the changes that they made were predominantly cosmetic. When they 'renovated' the Tower, the only reason they did the cladding was to make it look pretty. People liked the flats in the Tower because they were large.
10. The TMO was supposed to do reciprocal maintenance; they even had an everyday budget for it. It was supposed to cover things like if the tiles fall off the steps, those kind of things. The TMO was supposed to look after the budget and invest it back into the estate. None of that money was ever invested back into the estate.
11. There was a purge on garages at one point; they said that unless you have a car, you can't have a garage. It was ridiculous. The flats have such little storage and the double garages had such reasonable rent, some of us would use the garages for storage as well as for a vehicle. They stopped that though.
12. That is what has occurred in this estate, the voices of the residents have systemically and routinely been ignored.

14<sup>th</sup> June

11. On the evening of the fire Angel and I ate our evening meal as usual, relaxed and watched TV. We enjoyed the summer evening before we went to bed. I think we probably went to bed at about midnight, maybe a little bit after.
12. I wasn't woken by the fire. It must have been about 2am when my wife Angel heard knocking at the door. We heard one or two knocks, which we ignored but then, when we heard knocking for the third time. I came out in my pyjamas and answered the door. It was the fire brigade. They said that there was a fire in the Tower and that we needed to evacuate the Walkway.
13. I grabbed my wallet and keys and Angel grabbed her phone and our passports and that was about it. We got out straight away pretty much; it was within five minutes of answering the door to the fire brigade.

14. When somebody in a uniform comes around and tells you that you need to leave because it isn't safe, you don't hang around. A couple of people on the walkway stayed that night but I figure, you can always replace stuff, you can't replace people.
15. Before I left though, I went to the window in our living room and looked at the Tower, as you can see it pretty clearly from there. I could see that the fire had already spread to a couple of floors; the whole thing hadn't gone up by that point though. I couldn't believe what I was seeing; it was surreal, like an out of body experience. The smoke was black and the flames were so red. My thoughts went to the tenants of the Tower and I hoped that they had managed to leave their apartments.
16. Where I live is close to the Tower but it isn't like it's on top of us. Retrospectively, I think that even then, the fire fighters realised that they didn't have the fire under control which is why they felt like they needed to evacuate Hurstway Walk. The firefighters who asked us to leave didn't sound panicked but there was definitely a sense of urgency in their voices. Retrospectively I think that evacuating the walkway was a very real precaution in case the fire spread.
17. We left the flat and somebody told us, I can't remember who, to go round to Clarendon Walk where somebody would take our name and flat number. When we got there though there was nobody there. I couldn't believe that there wasn't a central point and a check list to work out who was accounted and unaccounted for. Angel and I were just wandering around by ourselves. From Clarendon Walk we walked to safe stores and back again. There's an alley way there. We must have stopped and waited about 100 metres from safe stores. We waited, sat on a wall, for about an hour.
18. You could partly see the Tower from Clarendon Walk but not very much of it. You could see properly the Tower from Safe Store. I can't even describe it. It wasn't just a quick fire. It was a fire that just went on and on and on. I'm not sure when it spread out but it was immense. It was like a roman candle. I have never seen anything like it before. It was shocking; I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I felt numb.



19. The smoke was billowing everywhere. It wasn't enough to make you cough and splutter, but it was enough to tickle your throat and you could taste the smoke in the air. The air was thick with the smoke.
20. There were lots of police around and from Safe Store we could see the ambulances to-ing and fro-ing. The volume of the ambulances showed us how many people had been hurt. You could see the fire services and police rushing around doing their jobs. It was like organised chaos. We didn't know what was going on; even the police didn't look like they knew what was going on. I didn't know what to feel about anything, I was pleased to see that there were so many service professionals doing their jobs. There was nothing that I could have done to help so it was good to see that there were people there helping,
21. There were lots of people milling around. We saw a few casualties and relatives of people stuck in the tower. It's a close knit community and I recognised some of the people. They must have come down as soon as they knew what was happening. The police didn't seem particularly concerned by the bystanders; I don't think they really knew what to do with them. I can remember all those people now, the relatives of people trapped in the Tower crying. I felt numb.
22. Angel and I waited by ourselves for about an hour in our pyjamas before somebody walked past and told us to come with them. I can't remember who this person was; they could have been a uniform or a volunteer. They took us the back way to the Portobello Rugby Club on Walmer Road. We were there in five minutes or so. I don't know what I was really thinking at the time, I think that I was mostly concerned about getting out of the cold and having somewhere to rest.
23. By the time we got to the club I think that it was about 4am. There were lots of other people in the club. Some of them were relatives of the victims and people who had escaped from the Tower. People were telephoning their relatives and things and trying to work out where people were and whether they were safe.

24. I felt overwhelmed by the enormity of the situation; it was only beginning to sink in what had actually happened. I felt over tired, numb and very concerned about my community.
25. There was a TV on in the Rugby club. I think that it was showing the news and the fire in the Tower. We didn't take much interest in it; we watched it a bit though. I think that was partly out of boredom.
26. We stayed in the Rugby club for the whole day pretty much. We watched the TV a bit; I think that it was showing the news and the fire in the Tower. I can't really remember. I felt overwhelmed by the whole thing and couldn't really engage with it. We were under the impression that we weren't allowed back into our flat. We weren't told this specifically but the general chat in the Rugby club was that the estate had been sealed off by the police. We accepted that this was the situation and stayed put; we didn't have anywhere else to go.
27. As the day passed, Angel and I occasionally left the Rugby club to see what was going on. I remember thinking that there was nothing much that we could do. There were lots of volunteers around but everything was so chaotic. There was no plan in place, even the air smelt of chaos. We weren't provided with any updates in the Rugby club, people didn't know what was going on. The smoke was prevailing.
28. I remember that at about 4pm or 5pm, the relatives of the victims started to get angry. I have no idea what was happening really. We didn't stay much longer than that. Angel made some phone calls and we ended up going to stay with Amy, one of Angel's friends, [REDACTED] We didn't have any clothes or anything. They wouldn't let us back into the flat and we had left in such a rush that we hadn't grabbed anything.
29. We stayed with Amy for a couple of days before we returned home. It was only whilst I was recovering at Amy's that I realised the scale of the disaster.

#### After the fire

23. A couple of days after the fire, Angel and I went to the Westway Centre to see what was going on. We registered with the Red Cross who asked us what our needs were. We didn't go there looking for anything, but at that point we still weren't back in our flat so we got some clothes and some food. I can't remember whether we were offered temporary accommodation or not. To be honest the days after the fire are a bit of a blur.
24. We met a local RBKC councillor at the Westway Centre who told us that the police were letting people back into their homes but that nothing official had been sanctioned as such.
25. We had heard through neighbours that there had been burglaries on the estate, with all the empty flats. We were told that there was police security on the estate so we decided to return home. Thankfully our home hadn't been burgled.
26. We came home as soon as we could. I am self employed so I needed to start work again and Angel needed to get back to the hospital. Not many people came back at the same time as us, people preferred to go to the temporary accommodation. It was a bit empty at first but gradually people started to return.
27. At first there was no hot water but we have an electric shower so that was fine. For us, the flat is our home. It's centralised and there isn't anything wrong with it. We didn't think that there was any point in going to the equivalent rooms that they were offering. We preferred to stay in the flat.
28. When we got back into the flat it smelt very strongly of smoke. The Tower carried on burning for a few days after it started so the smell of smoke penetrated everything. There was grime all over the walls and the ceiling and the soft furnishings smelt very strongly. The smoke smell didn't start to improve until it rained which was a couple of weeks later.

29. Since the fire we have had the kitchen re-done and we have re-painted the living room. We wanted to have the kitchen re-done anyway but it was partly as a result of the smoke damage from the fire.
30. The Tower was cordoned off for a long time. It still is but the restricted area isn't as big as it was. For at least 6 months the cordoned off area included the garden area outside our flat, the space in between Hurstway and Testerton Walk.
31. I knew people in the Tower who didn't survive the fire. The estate is a small and tight community. There's a woman called Sheila who used to live in the Tower. She was on the EMB for a short while. We weren't close exactly but she'd lived on the estate for as long as I had. I used to see her cycling around on her bicycle. She was quite eccentric. I miss not seeing her, you get used to seeing people. There are other people like that, who I wouldn't know to have a conversation with but I would get used to seeing around. I miss that.
32. Over the next few weeks every time I looked at the Tower I thought of the victims. They said that there were 70 victims. Regardless of what they say I think that there have got to be more than that, I think at least 120 people died. A lot of the people that live down here have relatives up on the Goldbourne estate. As it was Ramadan at the time, they would come down here to celebrate. I cut my teeth campaigning up on the Goldbourne estate so the relatives who came down used to recognise me.
33. There are lots of people who we just don't see any more. A lot of people weren't registered either so even the TMO didn't realise how many people were living in the Tower, let alone people visiting because it was Ramadan. The TMO never checked either.
34. At the beginning, when I saw the Tower I would think to myself how close we had been to not being able to sit in our flat any more. We felt very fortunate that we didn't lose our lives. It really made me appreciate what we have here.

35. It has always been such a strong community here. Before the fire a lot of new people had recently moved in. They had started putting on Christmas dinners for some of the older people. That was something really nice. At the end of the day, a community is what you make it.
36. People are slowly coming back to the estate but I think it will take years before it is like it was. There are lots of empty flats. Our Walkway has maybe half the amount of people living here than who lived before. I think that the other Walkways have even less people than that.
37. I am conservative with a small "c" but I think that Margaret Thatcher did a huge disservice to the country with regards to housing policy. I think that things started to go wrong back then. You know, in all cities you have working class people working jobs, where are they supposed to live?
38. In Germany the tenant is king. I think that we have a lot to learn from their housing model. If the only thing that comes about as a result of this inquiry is a change in housing policy in the UK, then I think that would be a good thing.
39. At the very minimum, there should have been a register of who was living there. That was my real bone of contention. If you go to a school or an office block, they have basic stuff like that. There was no contingency plan in place either. You hear about these catastrophe plans at the government level but they don't filter down to civilian level. That is why so many people in my view are still remaining unaccounted for.
40. There is more that I want to say about the history and background of the Tower and the aftermath of the fire. I understand that I will be allowed an opportunity to speak

about these matters at a later date. I would like to make a further statement as part of Phase 2 to discuss these issues.

**Statement of truth**

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

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

Signed:  D. STEWARD

Dated: 04 - JUNE 2018.