

Witness Statement of: Effi Stergiopoulou

No. of statement: 1

Exhibits:

Date of statement: 22.05.2018

GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF EFFI STERGIOPOULOU

I, Effi Stergiopoulou, will say as follows:

1. This statement is my account of events that took place on 14th June 2017. This statement is made 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

2. I work as a [REDACTED] for the [REDACTED].
3. I moved into [REDACTED] Hurstway Walk in late January or early February 2008. I am a leaseholder and I have a shared ownership with Notting Hill Housing.
4. From the windows of my living room you can see [REDACTED]. You can't see the Tower from my windows but it is very close to my flat.
5. There is more I wish to say about what it was like to live on the estate but I will wait to make a further statement as part of Phase 2.

14th June

6. On the evening of 13th June I think I was at home. I had gone to bed I think at around 11pm as I had to be up for work at 6:45am. I woke up at about 5am to go to the bathroom. Looking back, there was a racket in the background but the walls of the hallways in the Walkways are so thin that you usually hear people in the background and children running around, so I didn't think anything was out of the ordinary.
7. I went back to bed but as soon as I did my land line started ringing and it kept ringing, I thought this was unusual given how early it was so I went to the living room to answer the phone. It was my mum calling me from Greece. She told me that she had been watching the news and that there was a fire in Notting Hill. She does not know London well, but she knew I lived near that area.
8. I quickly looked outside of my living room window, which looks out onto [REDACTED], and I was shocked to see a line of about ten fire engines parked at the side of the road. I could see that smoke was drifting in the air from the direction of where the Tower is. It quickly dawned on me that it was Grenfell Tower which must have been on fire and that my mother had no idea how close the fire was to where I lived.
9. I always sleep with the windows open but I could not smell the smoke that night; it seems to have drifted in a different direction. I'm still confused why I didn't hear the sound of ten fire engines arriving, as I'm sure they would have woken me from my sleep, as my bedroom window also faces onto [REDACTED] and I don't sleep deeply, and the walls are really thin. I can only assume that the sirens were not turned on.
10. I know that there were road works on the corner of Bramley Road and Whitechurch Road for a few weeks because of gas works.
11. I was still on the phone with my mother, I turned away from the living room window and I turned on the TV and flicked through the channels for a few moments. I briefly saw the fire on the news. I quickly threw on some clothes so I could go outside and see what was happening, and on my way out I saw several messages on my phone about the fire, one from a friend abroad in Singapore, one from a London friend and another from a friend who lives in Shepherd's Bush. They were all checking in on me.

12. I rushed outside. There were kids everywhere. There is an entrance to Hurstway Walk at the back of the building between Hurstway Walk and Testerton Walk and you have a clear view of the Tower from there. I walked there so I could see what was happening. When I got there I could see the Tower on fire. It was such a shock.
13. I remembered that my mother had told me on the phone that people were still inside the Tower. When I looked at the Tower and saw the fire, it was obvious to that not everyone could have gotten out of the building alive. By then it must have been less than five minutes from when I first heard my mother calling my landline. Everything happened so fast.
14. The smoke coming from the Tower was quite heavy and it was a thick dark tunnel drifting off towards the Westway Centre above the rail line. At this point there was no fire from what I could see on the outside of the Tower, but you could see a red glow behind the windows of flats, only that the actual windows were no longer there. It was clear there was a fire still burning inside the building.
15. I saw one of my neighbours who had been up all night and she told me about what they had seen that night. My next door neighbour also came [REDACTED] in a state of shock. He told me that he had been watching the fire all night. He told me that he had watched people in the Tower with torches signalling and someone else in one of the top floors of the Tower trying to make a rope to get down.
16. I watched the fire for a maximum of thirty minutes as I knew I had to get to a meeting at work.
17. There were rumours that we would be evacuated from our homes so I went back into my flat at around 6am. I spoke with my friend who lives in Shepherd's Bush and she insisted that I stay with her for the night. I started to gather some essential things into a bag, in case we were evacuated, got ready and left for work. As I did not know what was going to happen, whether or not we would be evacuated, I decided that after work I would go to stay with my friend in Shepherd's Bush, she was also concerned and didn't want me staying in my flat that night. As I was leaving I looked out of my

window and saw firemen; their uniforms were covered in black and they looked really tired.

18. I think I left my flat for work at around 8am. It only takes me an hour to get to work. I remember I had to be at a meeting for 11am. I'm not sure how much time had actually passed that morning; I was in shock so I must have been in my flat for far longer than I can remember. I remember that when I arrived at work some of my colleagues were concerned about me, they kept telling me that I shouldn't be there and that I should go home, but I remember feeling numb.

Days following the Grenfell Tower fire

19. I stayed with my friend for a night but went back to Hurstway Walk the following day to collect some items. As the street was cordoned off, I approached the first police officer I could find and asked him whether I could go in to my flat and collect some items. He told me that no one was allowed into the building. As I was speaking to the police officer, I saw someone else go in to our building, which confused me. I asked the police officer how I was supposed to find out about what was happening. He said that I should go to Kensington Leisure Centre. As I carried on walking, I approached the next police officer I could see who was within shouting distance of the first police officer, told him what his colleague had just told me and asked them whether I could go in to my flat. They informed me that I could as our part of the building was not evacuated. I went in to my flat.
20. I did not feel safe to stay in my flat and had not been given any information about whether it was safe to be there, so I stayed with my friend until the Saturday 17th June.
21. I contacted the Council and TMO to try and find out what the plan was for our building and if any safety checks had been carried out as I did not know whether our building was secure, given the size of the fire. I did not know whether our building would be affected and I knew there were gas works on Bramley Road. They told me I was safe to go in but would not tell me what checks were done. When I insisted on being given more detailed information, they said that they could not give me anymore details as RBKC was about to issue a press release. I was shocked that they

were more concerned about the press release than about reassuring their residents about the safety of their homes.

22. I was uncomfortable at my friend's and wanted to be somewhere where I had my space so I went back to my flat. As soon as I was back I started sobbing as the shock and extent of the tragedy was settling in. To this day, I still often cry when I remember the fire and the horror of the weeks afterwards

23. The worst part about returning home was having to be near the Tower and having to walk past it on a daily basis. Latimer Road underground station was closed for a long time after the fire so I had to use Holland Park station to get to and from work. Every time I'd walk up Sirdar Road to get home I'd feel as if I was entering a different zone; for many weeks you could feel the tragedy in the air around the whole area, in my flat, on my balcony; you could feel there is a mass grave on our doorstep. There it became so unbearable that I had to leave the area or go to the countryside to get some respite.

24.



25. For a long time after the fire I could not trust myself to even cross the street because of the effects of the shock and trauma. I have nightmares about fires and flashbacks of what I saw.

26. Since the fire, I have been having difficulties with my memory. This was never an issue for me before that night.

27. I do everything I can to avoid looking at the Tower; I can't bear to look at it. There's still heaviness in the air. You can still feel the energy.

28. I didn't have a choice but to go back to my flat because I'm a leaseholder. I don't know what I would have chosen given other options

Statement of Truth

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

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

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'E' followed by a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Dated: this 22nd day of May 2018

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