
STATEMENT OF ELIAS AITEQUAKRIM

Preamble

1. I make this statement 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. I make this statement because I was living in the area at the time of the disaster. I witnessed the fire in its early stages and took a full part in the rescue such as it was.
3. I have grown up my whole life in the area. I was born in Chelsea [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] I had friends in the finger blocks [REDACTED]. That's my area, everyone knows me. I knew a lot of people in the Tower, some of them were on holiday at the time.
 - a. I knew Yasin el Wahabi who passed away. He was about 20 or 21. He knew my whole family. I used to be his football coach. There used to be three football pitches next to the Tower, where Kensington Aldridge Academy (KAA) is, before they built the school. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] I knew his dad because he used to pick him up from football. All of the Moroccans in the area knew each other. It was a tight community, but it's all broken now.

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- b. I knew Tony Disson, his son Charlie used to play in the Sunday league and Tony used to come and watch them play. I didn't know he was living in the Tower until after the fire.

Personal background

4. I was born on [REDACTED]. I was [REDACTED] years old at the time of the fire. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] I was working as a [REDACTED] for a company called [REDACTED]. Life was good. I didn't have any real worries, I had good people around me. Most of my friends were football fanatics like me.

13 June 2017

5. It was a typical Ramadan evening. I broke my fast and went to the mosque on [REDACTED]. Usually I would break my fast with my family, but that year I did it with my friends or by myself. It's a community thing – everyone goes to the mosque and then to the Lancaster West estate. Before the school was built we all used to play on the green pitch, the mums would come down with food. I used to go [REDACTED] and get crisps, people would go to Chicken Cottage and come back, we'd all just have bare food. Everyone stays up, we didn't go home to sleep. We'd all just hang around in the area. Before the school was there we used to go and play football at night, about 30-40 of us. The football pitches are gone now but we still used to go to the area to chill.

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First awareness

6. I went to near the KAA school. I was there from maybe just before 12. I was just chilling, doing what boys do. My sister Hanan called me on the phone. She was asking where I was, I told her I was outside Grenfell Tower. *"She told me there was a fire, come quick!"* I went to my sister, I went round past BUGGSI's and Latimer and up the ramp. I first noticed orangey flames from the side when I was on Silchester Road, by the school. It looked like a small fire.
7. Hicham, her husband, was on the other side. He was coming back from [REDACTED] There's a big age difference between me and Hicham [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Hanan was screaming at everyone in the Tower to get out. My main concern at that time was my sister. I told her to take the kids to mum's. In the beginning I think Yousra was with Hicham, but she had already gone back up to the Walk by the time I got there.
8. I got to the top of the ramp and stayed there, I was with Hicham. There were loads of people there. We were watching the fire for about 10-15 minutes. We could see it starting to spread, it was getting higher and going round. There was a lot of grey smoke, it got darker the higher it got. I could hear people inside the Tower were screaming "help", and we were screaming to people to "get out". I could hear the building burning, and pieces dropping from the building.
9. Hanan [REDACTED] said *"Elias, there's a lady there, help her."* She sounded urgent. The fire had grown more by this stage. This was before you get to the first floor boxing gym. [REDACTED] I saw a black guy trying to get out from his flat. He was looking out of the window. I haven't seen him since. He was looking out at the smoke. There were railings there, across the ramp going to the bottom of the tower. They had blocked it off with big black barriers. I saw the guy with a baby, he came out of the window and walked along the narrow ledge. He was holding onto his child.

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10. Hicham came over. We helped her out of the window. I now know that she is disabled. She didn't look well. She looked weak, as if she had no life in her. I had her on my shoulders. Her husband or boyfriend gave the child to Hicham, then came back to help. No-one had come to help us. I don't know why people said the fire brigade came quickly, I don't remember seeing them until much later on. Their flat was on the second floor. You have the creche on the first floor, then the boxing gym on the second floor, and then the flats started from the third floor. The fire wasn't far from them on the outside but obviously we didn't know what was going on inside. We walked along the ledge, Hicham was holding my back, making sure I didn't fall. I was worried about the drop. Her husband or boyfriend was with us. I said to her "hold me here, I've got you, I've got you." I was just trying to reassure her, and not let her know how bad the fire was. Some boys tried to get the lock of the gate open but they couldn't. I could see people trying to get out of the floors higher up. If I thought about it I would have hesitated. I was just full of adrenaline so I just got on and did it.
11. The woman and her husband or boyfriend were in a lot of shock. They were inside, so they couldn't see what was outside. She was just staring at the building. I was trying to talk to her but she wasn't replying.
12. A couple of minutes later I saw the fire brigade running towards us. The fire brigade came to where the gate is and they smashed the lock. No-one had a key. From the bottom they were trying to pull ladders up so we helped them – me, Hicham, Joseph, my friend Mo. There was a lot of us trying to help. It was awkward to bring the ladders up. They were pushing from below and we were pulling. There was a lot of people trying to help, it was a bit chaotic just because there was a lot of people. I think they put the ladder up against the wall. It's a bit of a blur but I think two young guys came out on the ladder. Hanan was calling me non-stop. A lot of things were dropping from the building, big silver pieces.
13. I saw a black guy tying up quilts. He was a bald guy, I've seen him on the news quite a bit. He was in the [REDACTED] hotel with me afterwards. He threw the quilts out of the window. They were long. I found out afterwards he was on the 14th or 15th floor. I don't know how many quilts he had, but they reached a long way down. He had his

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daughter tied to him on his back with a sheet, the way my Nan used to do it, the way they do in Africa. She was a little girl, about 2 or 3 years old. He started trying to climb down, everyone was screaming “No, don’t!” I think that’s the first point when I thought this is getting out of hand now, it’s gone to the next level. We didn’t know what was going on inside so all we had to judge how serious it was, was by what we could see on the outside. To see someone trying to climb out with sheets made me realise how bad it had got. Later, when I was standing by the station I remember seeing a black guy come out in his boxers, I think it was him.

14. I was stood at the bottom of the Tower, under the bridge to the Walks. I was looking up at the Tower and I saw a woman stand on the ledge and jump. She was high up: it was past halfway, [REDACTED] I turned away but I heard the sound as she hit the ground. Hicham actually saw the whole thing. I can still hear the sound in my head. I looked back and I saw the lady lying in a star position. She had long hair. She might have been Asian, she had a bit of colour to her. This was the hardest bit out of everything. She fell on the bricks in the park where the kids play. I saw blood on the bricks. It was too much for me. I look back after, and think – did I really see that? Did that really happen?
15. The police pushed us back after that, we were at the top of where the ramp goes down to the station. I saw someone hanging out of the window, a lady on the right-hand side of what I now know to be the south facing side of the Tower, a quarter of the way up. She was shouting “*Catch my baby! Catch my baby!*” I don’t know who caught it, I think it was a fireman – they were the only ones close enough. We’d been pushed back, so we were quite far away. I cannot remember anything about what this woman looked like. I told Hanan about it when I saw her. I saw [REDACTED] around at the time. I know I spoke to her after, round the back, but I’m not sure whether I spoke to her at this time. I think the baby survived because he or she was caught safely. What was sad about it was that the mother was still inside.
16. The police had come by this point, they were saying “*Move back, move back*”. They kept pushing us, back down the ramp towards Latimer Road station. People were shouting at

them “*Let us help!*” There were heated tempers but we all wanted the same thing, to help the people trapped in the Tower.

17. We got pushed all the way back to Latimer Road station. Everyone was in the area now. I could see the Tower. Hanan came back, she was making calls to people she knew in the Tower. She told me that [REDACTED] had also been calling her friends in the Tower. Everyone was here by now, whoever got out was out already.
18. I could see a helicopter, it was BBC or Sky News. I could tell it wasn't the emergency services because they weren't helping anyone. It was there for a while just circulating. I was stood at the bus stop near the station, outside BUGGSI's, watching the Tower burn down. There were satellite dishes burning on the top of the Tower, there were pieces of. They were on the top floor, in the right-hand corner of what I now know is the West side of the Tower. I could see two people. I could hear they were screaming. They were screaming for hours. I'm sure it was a man and a lady, that's what they looked like. They kept coming I saw the helicopter near them and I thought it was going to help them, but it didn't. I could hear the burning, and things dropping – *pshhhhh*. I could see the couple, and then the smoke would go over them and I couldn't see them any more. This happened a number of times. The fire brigades were fighting the fire, but they couldn't do anything. The fire was just too strong. That was the worst image – that's humans there, burning to death.
19. At about 5.30 or 6am – it was light outside – Hanan was round the back where the park was. I went to join her. I looked at the Tower and I could see an Asian guy waving something like a towel. He was a little short bald guy, Chinese or Asian, he was old. I could see him clearly. It was like I got a quick buzz, there was someone who could still be helped! I found out later that the guy got out. That felt great. I thought he wasn't going to make it. I saw him put his head out of the window, and go back in. I don't know why he was going back inside.
20. There was nothing more that anyone could do. It felt hopeless. I hadn't eaten or drank anything since I broke my fast earlier that night. I saw people running around helping, bringing water, bringing food. [REDACTED] and my brother Hicham were calling me. [REDACTED]

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was around the area. I told everyone that I was okay. I was standing around with my friends, there was nothing to do. People were crying. It was like a horror movie.

21. After that, me and Hanan and Hicham were sitting on the kerb outside the Church. We were just knackered. It must have been about 7 or 8am by now. I could see the fire brigade drinking water, coming out all smoked up. It was all dying down by then. I refused to speak to the press, no-one tried to ask me any questions. [REDACTED] was with us, we were just sat around. At some point I went back to my mum's house by myself. She asked me to come over. Hanan was already there. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] A few days later I went to the mosque to help. I was loading the vans with clothes, nappies, and food. I was just trying to occupy myself, keeping myself busy, instead of thinking about what had happened.

22. Three or four days after, I was still volunteering at the mosque helping others. People were still saying that Yasin and his family were alive. My niece [REDACTED] was friends with his little sister Nur Huda. She used to play with her in the park. It was cruel. No-one was getting any information.

23. The community is strong. People who don't speak, don't get along, they squashed their beef because of this. "*Life 's too short*", they said to each other. That was a good thing to see.

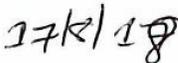
Documents, photographs and related

24. There is now produced and shown to me the following videos recorded by me on Snapchat during the events on the night and subsequently saved to my mobile phone. These videos are not timed.

- a. EA/01: The fire is on the north-east corner of the Tower. I can hear someone shouting "Come down!" [REDACTED] I could see the east, south and west sides of the Tower from the ramp.
- b. EA/02: This video shows the fire brigade with a hose up a big ladder.

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- c. EA/03: This is filmed from next door to BUGGSI's. The whole Tower is up in flames. It's starting to get light outside.
- d. EA/04: I've already gone round the back so I think this is around 7-8am. People were starting to get ready to go to work. There was pure black smoke at the top and red flames at the bottom.

Statement of Truth

I confirm that the contents of this witness statement are 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.

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