

Witness Name: Gimja TEKIE

Statement No. : 1

Dated: 21 May 2018

THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

**WITNESS STATEMENT OF GIMJA TEKIE
FLAT 202 23rd FLOOR**

I, **GIMJA TEKIE**, of [REDACTED] SW10 [REDACTED] formerly of Flat 202 Grenfell Towers, WILL SAY as follows:-

1. I am a core participant in the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry.
2. I was born on in [REDACTED] (this is all I recall of my date of birth). I describe my ethnicity as [REDACTED]
3. [REDACTED] I am a retired pensioner.
4. [REDACTED]
5. [REDACTED]

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- [REDACTED]
6. With regard to my communications needs, I prefer to have a [REDACTED] interpreter when giving oral evidence even though I can communicate in English.
 7. I have made a statement to the Metropolitan Police and I confirm that I consent to any police statement I have made being disclosed to the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry.

Introduction

8. I resided at Grenfell Tower. I would have died in the fire if it had not been for the fact that I was staying at my daughter's home on the night before the fire.
9. This statement is mainly about my experiences and that of my family on 14 June 2017 and it deals with what the Inquiry has called 'Phase 1' matters, setting out what happened to us when the fire broke out and consumed Grenfell Tower, which was my family's home. I will provide greater detail of 'Phase 2' matters as the Inquiry progresses, after I have seen the disclosure materials and in particular my housing file held by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea ('RBKC').
10. This is an account for me and for my family, in my words.

Family life

11. I describe my family as made up of myself, and my daughters and grandchildren. I lived in Grenfell Tower with my daughter, Lidia Fesshazion, [REDACTED]. She had her own room and would spend time with me, particularly before she got married. My grandson, [REDACTED], was born on [REDACTED]. Lidia and I moved into the flat together in 1998 and she was joint tenant with me until she got married on 30 May 2015.

Pre-fire life

12. I was a resident in Grenfell Tower at flat 202, on the 23rd floor. This the upper most floor of accommodation in the Tower. I lived there with my daughter, Lidia, until she married and then moved out. However, even though she was married and had moved in with her husband, she would still stay with me regularly to help and look after me. The time she spent staying with me at Grenfell Tower increased when she had a baby, in 2017, as I helped my daughter look after my grandchild.
13. I had retained a bedroom in the flat with my daughter's belongings and she would still spend most of her time with me. She would also stay with me to help me. I am blessed to have her as my daughter and my friend. We are a very close-knit family.
14. I believe that it is essential to convey to the Inquiry that the Grenfell Tower was not just a block of flats, with people living in isolation from each other, which is often the case with private flats. Everyone who lived at Grenfell Tower will confirm that it was like living within a small community or village. In many cases it felt more like a big family.
15. Residents and their families all knew each other as many had lived there for their whole lives. They would often go in and out of one another's flats, almost as though there were no separating walls. People treated other flats simply an extension of their own homes. It was like a big family home in Grenfell. The children of the Tower would play with each other on the landings and spend time in the flats of friends and neighbours, having dinner with them or staying overnight. It was more like a village of families placed on top of one another, with everyone knowing each other and being a close community. The children would pop their heads around our front door and smile and then run away.
16. At the time of the fire we had a young couple staying with us, as our guests, in our flat at Grenfell Tower. We had met them through a family friend. Their names were Marco and Gloria and they had been staying with us since April 2017. They both died in the fire.

17. On the day before the fire, my daughter Lidia, her husband and my grandson and I, were coming back from our holiday in Italy and we arrived back in the UK at about 1:00 am the morning 13 June 2017, of the day before the fire.
18. We took a taxi to my daughter, Lidia's, flat where we went straight to bed, as it was late and we were exhausted from travelling. We woke up later on the morning before the fire, 13th June 2017. We were at my daughter's flat. We had breakfast at her place.
19. I was having building works undertaken at my flat in Grenfell Tower and they were due to have been completed by the time we returned from our holiday, so I wanted to go back to my flat, as soon as possible, to inspect the completed building works. These works were undertaken on a private basis and not through the council and complied with all legal requirements.
20. As such my daughter, Lidia, and I ordered a cab and travelled with my luggage to my flat in Grenfell in the afternoon of the 13th June 2017. Upon arriving at the Tower, we went into my flat to see the completed building works and to unpack.

The evening of the 13 June 2017

21. We had returned to the flat in the afternoon of the 13th June in order to see the building works and for me to take my holiday luggage back home. The plan was for my daughter Lidia and I to stay at Grenfell Tower that night (which would have been the night of the fire). We went into the flat and saw the builder who had finished the building works.
22. At this point it felt like a normal day and we obviously had no idea of the tragedy which would unfold in a few hours.
23. Lidia unpacked some of my holiday luggage and said that she had to return to her flat at [REDACTED] in order to collect some items and get things ready for the next day as she and my grandson would come and stay with me.

24. The reason I did not stay at my flat but went with my daughter to her place was that she begged me to go back with her rather than staying at my flat, as we had all had a lovely week's holiday together and she did not want it to end.
25. Therefore, we took a Tube train back to Lidia's flat, [REDACTED] with a view of returning to my flat at Grenfell Tower later. Once we arrived at my daughter's flat, she said she was too tired to return back to Grenfell Tower again. She was exhausted from all the travelling. Therefore, we all decided to stay at her place.

The morning of the 14 June 2017

26. My daughter told me the fire started at 12:54 am on the morning of 14 June 2017. This meant that I was asleep at my daughter's flat when the fire started at Grenfell Tower.
27. Lidia has since told me that she was the first of us to know about the fire, as she received a phone call some time before 7:00 am on the morning of the fire. I came downstairs about twenty minutes later after I woke up and it was then that I saw the TV coverage and our home was on fire.
28. My initial reaction to the fire was one of shock and disbelief. I was wailing uncontrollably in distress. I just could not understand what was going on and how it had happened. I kept thinking of all the people I knew who had probably lost their lives.
29. In particular, I was thinking of Marco and Gloria (the people staying with us), my neighbours Flora, Berekti, Noora, Moses, and the Hassan children. I also thought of all of the other children that I knew living in the Tower and presumably lost in the fire. The fire was so extreme it was terrifying.
30. I wanted to go to the Tower to try and see if the people we knew from the Tower were all right. However, my daughter, Lidia said that it was best she went on her own given the language barriers I have. Therefore, my daughter, Lidia, went to the Tower to check on

Marco, Gloria, and on our neighbours Flora, Moses, the Hassans to see what had happened them and our other neighbours and friends in the Tower.

31. Lidia threw on her clothes and her husband drove her to the Tower. I remained at my daughter's flat with my grandson. I watched the burning Tower on TV during the day.

32. I continued to be in a state of shock and could not watch.

33. I could not stop crying. All I could think about was the people in there and how we were only alive because we had decided to stay at my daughter's flat that night. Since then I have held a feeling of guilt that I survived and so many others, including children, perished. I thought of the children that I had known all of their short lives, who would come and visit us and would always be playing in the flats. As I stated above the Tower was more like one big family.

34. My daughter, Lidia, called the police on 911 to confirm that we were alive, but we had no news of Marco and Gloria and, therefore, informed the police that they were missing.

35. I remained at my daughter's flat with my grandson. I was in a state of total shock.

My experience of the fire

36. As stated above, even though, I was not physically present at the fire, I saw the fire unfold on the news reports on TV. When I first saw the Tower in flames, I was devastated, and my first thought was for Marco, Gloria, and all my neighbours all of the people that I knew who were presumably burnt to death in the fire. This was especially true of all the young children that I knew and had known all of their lives.

Injuries suffered

37. I did not suffer any physical injuries as I was at my daughter's flat at the time of the fire. However, emotionally and psychologically I am in pieces. It has actually become worse as time has gone on. I cannot stop thinking about all the people that were lost, especially

the little children. I can still see the images on the TV, knowing that people close to me were in there and had been burnt to death.

The events directly after

38. In the days that followed the fire, I received no assistance from the council. I continued to stay with my daughter and remained with her for about two weeks, until the council moved me into a hotel on a temporary basis. I received no support from the council other than the provision of a hotel room. My daughter, Lidia, would go every day to all the centres set up by various local groups aimed at supporting victims of the fire. My daughter would also go to the centres to try and find what had happened to Marco and Gloria who were in the Tower. We received no support from anyone and we were left to our own devices.

Medical issues

39. I did not require any medical treatment for physical conditions, but I am suffering psychologically from the trauma of the fire.

Housing

40. I initially stayed with my daughter at her flat for a couple of weeks and then I was moved by the council into the Dorset Hotel and then to the Thistle Hotel. However, it took an extremely long time and required a huge amount of work on the part of my daughter with assistance from my solicitor to obtain permanent accommodation.

Initial support

41. In the days following the fire no initial support was provided by the council. I relied wholly on my daughters, especially Lidia, to provide me with food and accommodation and provide me with life's essentials. Without her I do not know what I would have done.

42. On the morning of the fire my daughter, Lidia, went to the Rugby Portobello Trust looking for people. I understand that she was provided with advice as to hotels, food and other necessities.
43. At no point did the TMO or council contact me to see how I was or to help me. Everything that we found out was as a result of my daughter enquiring and going to all of the charities.
44. My daughter, Lidia contacted RBKC regarding accommodation and they eventually provided a hotel room.
45. I did attend the relief centres including the Westway. However, the Westway were not helpful. For example, when I told the NHS team there about my high blood pressure and that I lost my medication in the fire, they simply asked me why I had come to the Westway and not simply go to my GP.

The months following the fire

46. In the months following the fire I continued to be dependant upon my family. Even though I had been placed in a hotel, this was obviously a hotel room and not designed to be lived in for long periods of time.
47. I spent most of my time following after fire trying to get my life back together. Lidia took time off from work in order to help me in terms of getting help and trying to get me out of the hotel room and into proper accommodation. Without her I do not know what I would have done.

Concerns about fire safety

48. I had concerns about the TMO wanting to install the boiler by our front door. They proposed to put it right next to my front door which meant if it could have caught fire as this would make getting out difficult as it was the only exit out of the flat.

Concerns about modifications to the Tower

49. Following the modifications undertaken to the actual whole Tower, I had concerns which included the following matters, set out below.
50. The council wanted to place the boiler outside of our flat next to our front door to the right when you are looking away from the door. My concern was that if the boiler caught fire it would block the only exit from the flat.
51. I argued that the boiler should not be placed there and so they placed it in the kitchen behind a cupboard. This was near the entrance to the kitchen, on the left in the last cupboard. I was not happy with it being there because they had simply put it into an existing cupboard rather than a proper purpose built space.
52. Further, the boiler appeared to only have half the cover as the pipes and wires at the bottom were exposed.
53. My other concern was that the new windows had plastic frames, were previously had metal frames with a wooden outside. When they installed the new windows they took out everything including the metal frame and put in all plastic frames.
54. When I saw the contractors putting the windows in, I could see that they filled the gaps including between the window frame and the walls as well as any gaps with a foam material.
55. My other concern was the piping running from outside into the flat above the front door through holes and which then ran throughout the flat along the ceiling. If there was a leak or a burst pipe, then boiling water would come down on us.
56. I believe that some of the other pipes (in addition to the water pipes) may have been carrying gas and I was concerned that they were flammable.

57. My daughter, Lidia, spoke to the Tenants' Management Organisation ("TMO") and we both attended the Grenfell Committee meetings which was supported by Unite the Union. I believe that she spoke to a lady called "Claire" at TMO's office. I went along with other residents to the Grenfell Committee meetings to fight to have changes made to the Tower, such as the pipes and the boilers. However, the TMO refused to do anything at that time. People also went to the local MP, but I do not remember what happened with that.
58. As a result they moved the piping to the bottom of the flat wall rather than along the top. I had had concerns about the piping carrying hot water above because the hot water could come down on me in the event of an accident.
59. The same piping that was running through my flat also ran throughout the outside of my flat on the top of the landing outside. I also had concerns that if the pipes burst, then boiling water would come down on anyone below them. The piping that ran along the ceiling outside of my flat meant that the outside landing became smaller. It meant that on the outside, the landing area was reduced by about a meter and a half in width.
60. I had concerns generally about the refurbishments which is why I attended the Grenfell Committee meetings. People raised concerns with the TMO. There was a general feeling of concern about the work that they were undertaking including the delays in finishing the works, which had overrun by many months.
61. With regard to my concerns I spoke to my daughter, Lidia, who spoke to Claire Williams at TMO. I did not speak to her personally.
62. When I called Lidia explaining about the piping, I was in tears because I was so upset by what they had done. It looked dangerous and it looked ugly. I did not think that they were going to do the works as they did. I was scared because of my worries about the piping and other issues.

Other Information

63. When we first moved into the flat it was in a bad state and required all the rooms and doors to be painted, new carpets laying, and generally bringing up to an acceptable standard.
64. From the time that we moved into Grenfell Tower and all the time afterwards, we were never provided with information about fire safety by either the council or the Fire Brigade. Neither were we given any information about how to get out in the event of a fire. I do not recall seeing any notices in the Tower.
65. I was not aware of the London Fire Brigade carrying out any home fire checks.
66. I did not know what to do if there was a fire, as nobody had ever told me. I did not know if there were any smoke alarms in the Tower's communal areas but there were smoke alarms in my kitchen and hallway. I do not know if they were linked up, though.
67. I think my front door did close automatically but I really cannot recall. There was no damage to my front door prior to the fire. Although, the letter box would sometimes stick in the open position.
68. I would always use the lifts due to my mobility problems. The lifts were not reliable, and they would often break down. There were occasions when both lifts broke down and I would have to go to my daughters. It would take between a few days and a week for the lifts to be fixed.
69. The lights on the landing outside my flat would sometimes go out, but not often. No emergency lighting went on, when the lights did fail. I cannot recall when this last happened.
70. There was a caretaker at the Tower, but I do not know his name and I did not know how to contact him. He was not there very often, but when he was around he would clean the hallway and lifts, as I recall.

71. I would like to say that I will never forget what has happened until earth and stone cover my body. Each day, I remember the tragedy and all those who have gone. It has been a challenging and harrowing time emotionally, physically and mentally. I have lost good friends and neighbours, who I loved, and I lost my home. It has been an ordeal which was made worse by the lack of support and constant upheaval of dealing with council officials. It has been a very difficult for my daughter, Lidia, who had to take time off work to look after me. I still miss my home and friends.

72. I am in a new flat but I wish I could go back to my home at Grenfell Tower.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I confirm that I am willing that the statement forms part of the evidence before the Inquiry, and may be published on the Inquiry's website, save for redactions indicated in the text, and those applied by the Inquiry.



Signed: _____

Gimja Tekie

Dated: 21 May 2018