

IN THE MATTER OF THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

STATEMENT OF HICHAM CHERBIKA

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 a resident of [REDACTED] Grenfell Walk at the time of the fire and I witnessed the early stages of the fire spreading and the emergency response. I was involved in the voluntary emergency response. My wife Hanan Cherbika, and I are both core participants to the Inquiry.
3. I knew a number of people from the Tower, including some who passed away. I knew Hash Abdeslam, an older man who lived in the Tower. He was Moroccan and we used to pray together in the mosque. My family were friends with the El Wahabi family, my daughter [REDACTED] in particular was very close with Nur Huda. I also knew Biruk Haftom, who was in my daughter's class at school. I would know more to say "hello" to, but I can't recall their names.

Personal background

4. I was born on [REDACTED]. At the time of the fire I was 39 years old. I am a Moroccan and British national. My family knew Hanan's family, I met her when she visited Larache where I was born, around 1998, and I liked her and she liked me and we fell in love. We

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Hicham Cherbika

Signed:



Dated:

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married in 2000 in Larache. I came to the UK in 2002. I lived at first in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] with Hanan's parents, then in Kings Cross, then in [REDACTED] near Ladbroke Grove station. We moved to [REDACTED] Grenfell Walk in 2005, we had been living there for about 12 years at the time of the fire. We lived there with our kids, [REDACTED] who was 12 at the time of the fire, [REDACTED] who was 8 and [REDACTED] who was around 6 months. Hanan was a full time mum. Before that she had been a [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] [REDACTED], from around 2006 until about 2012. I used to help mind [REDACTED] when he was a baby but I was working and had two jobs so after a time Hanan gave up work.

5. [REDACTED] knew all the local kids and was very happy. She played with her friends, she was popular. She went to [REDACTED] which was next to Grenfell Tower. She was excited to go to [REDACTED] and was in first year at the time of the fire. When I came home from work she was on break in the playground. Every day she would look out for me and shout "Hi! Dad!" I miss that time, now. She also went to Arabic school and speaks English and Arabic equally well. [REDACTED] also went to the gym at the sports centre with me and she loved swimming. She was top of her classes but she does not do so well now. The fire has had a big effect on her.
6. [REDACTED] went to [REDACTED] at the time of the fire. He was crazy about football – Chelsea. He is very good and played for a youth team at QPR for a while. He then played for the football team at Portabello Rugby club but he stopped after the fire. Again, the fire has had a big effect on him.
7. We knew everyone on the Walk, many in the other blocks and the Tower. We were very happy, it was a safe and friendly place. We lost our home and our community in the fire. Everything changed.
8. At the time of the fire I was working as a [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] which was a 5 minute walk from home. I started working there in 2014 and I still work there now. I had done a First Aid course, and I used to deal with peoples' cuts and things like that in the kitchen.



9. I am currently living at the [REDACTED] but I am just about to move to a new address near [REDACTED]. It is a nice home but it cannot replace what we had at Grenfell.
10. Our flat at [REDACTED] Grenfell Walk was on the 2nd and 3rd floors of the walkways. When you went through our front door there were two bedrooms, a bathroom and a toilet. Upstairs was the kitchen and living room with a balcony at the back. The kitchen looked out on to the Tower and the park. It was a big window the full length of the kitchen with a good view. It was very close to the Tower, I could speak to people on the same level of Grenfell Tower. I could hear their TVs.

13 June 2017

11. I was in work as usual on 13 June, just a normal day. I was fasting as it was Ramadan. I went to the mosque four times. I don't remember anything much happening that day. During Ramadan I would usually go to the late prayers at the Al-Manaar mosque on [REDACTED]. I broke my fast as usual at sunset – iftar time, I then went to the mosque around 10:30. After prayers I would go for coffee with friends for about an hour. I cycled home, it took 5 minutes. I think I got home at 1am. There are two ways you can get onto Grenfell Walk, using the stairs or the ramp. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] when I am on my own I use the ramp because it is quicker. I used the ramp on that night.

First awareness

12. I cycled up the ramp and it was when I got to the top and turned onto the Walk that I saw the fire brigade. The first thing I saw was the flash of lights. I got off the bike and I could see two fire engines near the front doors of the Tower and some firefighters around the fire engines. I could not see any fire. I did not hear any sirens. I did not hear shouting, I remember it was quiet.
13. I went up to my flat, locked the bike onto the balcony, and opened the door and went up the stairs to our sitting room – Hanan was waiting for me to come home. I shouted to



Hanan as I went up the stairs - the living room is at the back of the flat, *"There's something going on outside the Tower - there are fire engines"*. I said that I want to go to check what's happening. My daughter [REDACTED] heard me and followed me outside.

14. I walked down to the Walk and turned right toward the stairs near the Tower. Before I got to the stairs I called my friend Yousef who lives in the Tower to check on him, he lives on one of the middle floors. He had been in the [REDACTED] but he had not come back with me on that night. I said to him, *"Yousef! Something's wrong in the Tower"*, and he said *"No - I just came upstairs and I didn't see anything"*. I said again *"No Yousef, something is happening"*. As soon as I went downstairs I saw the fire fighters. I walked through them and round to the right hand side of the Tower as you look at the entrance. I saw the fire inside a flat straight away. It wasn't outside at this time. I called Yousef straight back and said *"There's a fire in the building - get out"*. He said *"Yeah, yeah"* and that he would get his family and get out. He later told me that he went and checked and then went back to get his family and got them out. I did not have any other numbers to call other people in the Tower but [REDACTED] was taking pictures and Snapchatted them. Later [REDACTED] and Hanan phoned people they knew in the Tower to tell them to get out.

Recordings

15. I started filming on my phone. I recorded videos of the early stages of the fire and attach the following photographs and video files as exhibits:

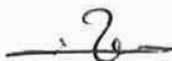
HC/01 - 01:08 - still photograph of the fire inside Flat 16. I am standing in front of the east side of the Tower, near the sports centre.

HC/02 - 01:09 - video footage of the fire inside Flat 16. I can be heard on the video, saying *"is it your house bruv?"* and a male voice says *"Yes"*.

HC/03 - 01:09 - video footage of the fire inside Flat 16. The video shows one of the fire engines, and a firefighter on the ground level. You can hear him saying *"You lot, get away from there - come away from there"*.

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HC/04 – 01:11 – video footage of the fire inside Flat 16. The fireman is pulling a hose along the ground. I said “*Oh my god – it’s getting worse*”. The fire has spread to outside the window. I say “*Is it your flat?*” and a male voice says “Yes”.

HC/05 – 01:12 - The fire has now spread onto the outside of the building. You can hear me say “*Eamon, what’s happening bruv?*” over the video.

HC/06 – 01:13 – video showing the fire spread to above the window, and to the floor above. I can hear me, Eamon and [REDACTED] talking over the video. [REDACTED] was starting to get scared at this time. I can hear [REDACTED] saying “*They’re not answering.*” I think she was trying to call her friend Nur Huda, who lives in the Tower. She was on the phone to Hanan at the time, I can hear her saying “*The fire’s going round, are you alright there?*” She was getting worried about her mum and her brothers. I can hear the glass of the window breaking, and [REDACTED] saying “*The glass is breaking, that’s scary*”.

How the fire spread

16. At first the fire was in one window. I spoke to a man stood next to me, I had not seen him before, I think he might be Eritrean. I think he was in his fifties and he was on his own. I asked him “*What’s happening?*” He said “*That’s my flat. My fridge blew up.*” He was filming on his phone. He said that the fridge blew up and it caused the fire. He told me that he knocked on his neighbours’ doors but no-one answered, and in the end he came out of the building on his own. It was just him, me and a few other people outside the Tower at this stage. I saw a man called Eamon come out of the building, I know him through my brother but I do not know his full name. After he came out he was filming too. You can hear Eamon’s voice on my video.
17. Within a few minutes the fire had really spread. It was outside the building now, it went up and then to the side. It looked red. I could hear the fire I remember the edges of the windows burning. The fire grew very fast, I never saw a fire like that. We didn’t think it was going to go high, because the fire brigade were there and we thought that they would get it under control. It felt like it took the fire brigade a long time to get the hose out. I did not see any ladders at this time. I did not ever see any firefighter on a ladder with a hose. When I first came down the fire was the size of the window, but every few



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seconds the fire spread more. It was too strong and too powerful. When the fire fighters eventually got the hose out I remember the water would not quite reach the flat where the fire started.

18. The cladding was dropping onto the trees and onto peoples' heads and we ran out of the way. Different things were falling down. Big pieces and small pieces. There was black smoke and a bad smell. Like when you burn oil. You can hear the fire brigade shouting "*Get away from there*" over my video. They shouted for us to "*Get back*". That was because things were falling.
19. The fire fighters moved us back to the gym, they moved us out of the way: the cladding was falling into the area where we were standing. I saw Hanan Wahabi and her husband and her two kids, they lived in the Tower. Hanan is friends with my wife but I know the family as well. Hanan was on the phone to her brother. He was still in the Tower and, unfortunately, he and his wife and three kids died in the fire . Her son [REDACTED] tried to grab the phone to speak to his uncle. Hanan was saying "*Get out*", she was having a conversation with him. She was crying and panicking. I don't know what he was saying because I couldn't hear him. At this time, people in the crowd around me were saying that they had been told to stay where they were, in their flats.
20. Then I saw Jessica Urbano's dad. She died in the fire. I knew him to say hello to. He had no top on. He was screaming and shouting. He was crying and crying. I saw someone who I thought was Jessica's mum too, but she wasn't with him. She was pointing towards her flat, and shouting "*The fire 's going up, look!*" She was on the phone, she was crying. I did not understand what she was saying.
21. I ran to the area just outside the entrance to the Tower because I felt that I needed to help. I was helping people as they came out of the Tower. I helped many people as they came out. I was shouting to people, "*Come on, hurry up, come down.*" I could see people coming down the stairs in the foyer, I was trying to hurry them up. I can't recall any fire fighters in this area at that time and the police hadn't arrived yet. The people coming out had black faces from the smoke. There were a lot of people.



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22. I heard [REDACTED] shout "Dad!" After that she went upstairs. I went back to where I was to begin with. I realised I had left my young daughter by herself. My brain wasn't working – I just thought I needed to help. I went back upstairs and Hanan brought our kids out of the flat. Hanan was shouting at the people in the Tower, screaming: "Fire, get out", without stopping. She was crying as well. There was a lady at one of the windows asking "Why are you shouting? What's going on?" She was higher than Hanan but not very high up. I saw people in our area of Grenfell Walk coming out in their pyjamas, Hanan was knocking on all of their doors.
23. We took the kids to Hanan's mum's house and came back to the area and parked back at Latimer Road. By this time the police were starting to arrive. Hanan asked one of the officers what was happening and he said that they didn't know what was going on. Hanan and I walked up the ramp. Hanan went back to the front balcony where our flat is, to make sure the neighbours were all out. She also went back to get some things from our flat.
24. I ran along the Walk and back down the stairs to the Tower to help. I was running down the stairs and I slipped. I didn't feel it at the time, probably because of the adrenaline, but I have back pain now and the doctor has said that [REDACTED] I went to the area of the Tower and went to the outside door, in the porch area. The door was open and I was pulling people out of it, away from the building. There were two fire engines at the front. Loads of us tried to run into the foyer but the police stopped us. I was going to go up the Tower to help people. There were firefighters going in at this time.
25. I went back up the stairs to the Walk and met Hanan and Elias. I saw a disabled lady on the bridge which used to link the Walk to the Tower. She was with a man who I thought must be her husband or brother. I had seen the lady before but not spoken to her other than to say "Hello". There was a locked high gate – higher than me - across the bridge to the Walk and we could see that she was stuck, she couldn't climb over because she can't walk properly. I heard Hanan scream to Elias, her brother, "Go help with the lady". Me and Elias lifted her over the wall next to the gate. I do not know how we did that, it was very hard to get her round the gate, it was very, very dangerous because there is a big



drop but we had to do it, we could not leave her. Her husband or brother was with her, so I left her with him once we got her onto the Walk.

26. I then helped Hanan to the car with a bag she had got from our flat and then went back up the ramp. We saw over-tired firefighters under the ramp. We were shouting "*Help, do something*", trying to get them to help people in the Tower. Yousef was there at this time, he had obviously escaped from the Tower. The fire was round this side of the Tower by this time – the side near the park. I could feel the heat from the fire, it was very hot and I could smell the smoke. People were coughing. I was coughing.
27. When we were shouting to the firefighters I saw a woman falling and I heard the scream. She fell down the side of the Tower on the side where the park is. People around me started shouting and screaming that a lady had just thrown herself off the building. I remember a man shouted: "*Oh my god, the lady threw herself down*". She hit a solid bench with a huge bang. I was shaking and I wanted to do something but I could not. She just stayed where she fell. No-one went to help her. No one covered her. They left her where she was for a long time. [REDACTED]
28. About three or four minutes later the riot police pushed us down the ramp. I knew they were riot police because they were wearing the helmets with the visors down and were carrying long shields. I videoed this at 03:32, which I exhibit as HC/21. They were aggressive, pushing and hitting us. They came from the back of the Walk. I think they were called by a police officer on the Walk who was having a hard time from the local kids, they were telling him to "*Fuck off*". They were shouting at the police to help the people in the Tower. The police pushed us and hit us all the way off the Walk and down towards Station Walk.
29. I went down the ramp and back under the Walk to the park. I wanted to get to the Tower again but there was a line of police that stopped us. There was a Syrian guy coming from the direction of the Tower – I found out later that his brother died in the fire, but I do not know his name. He had his phone in his hand, and seemed dizzy, he could not walk



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properly. His face was black with smoke. There was an older lady next to him, not with him, she was screaming and crying, shouting "*Oh my god*".

30. I was stood on the Tower side of the Walk. Something fell on my eyes and my nose, I think it was some of the cladding. It hit me and when I touched my nose and the area around my eye it felt like an electric shock. Its affected my eyes. When I closed my eyes it felt like acid on my eyes. My eyes still get bloodshot at night.
31. I saw a dark-skinned lady with no clothes, just a top on her, swaying and unsteady. She was screaming and shouting and clawing at her face. She wasn't speaking English, or Arabic, because I couldn't understand her. I thought that she had left someone in the Tower by how distressed she was. The families of people in the Tower started joining us in the park. When it got too busy the police cleared the area. I was helping the people who were on the floor.
32. I went back to Latimer Road. There were a lot of ambulances and paramedics in this area. There was a lot of activity going on. A lady was vomiting, in fact there were others vomiting too. People were dropping, and so I was trying to help people, giving them water. Neighbours on Hurstway Walk, a Somalian family, were handing out water from their windows. People were bringing water from shops. I can't remember any individuals, apart from someone who was disabled. I don't have a clear memory of them, I can't remember if this was a man or a woman. The ambulance officers came and took him or her. I remember seeing people who were dizzy, unsteady on their feet. I just gave them some water.
33. From Latimer Road I could see people in the Tower shouting and screaming, and waving cloths. I was filming at the time, this is video HC/18. They are three floors from the top, in the flat furthest to the right from where I was standing. I could see them waving cloths and then a minute or two later they had gone. The man went from view and never came back, and then I saw the lady drop.
34. I saw Yousef's family. His mother in law hugged me and said "*I don't know how to thank you. You saved my family. You saved my daughter. Without my daughter I would die*". His brother was there too, he was thanking me. Yousef told me that he was just about to

go to sleep when I called, he had work the next day. I just kept telling them that I would have done more if I could.

35. By 4 or 5am no one could get inside the tower. The heat was too much. You could feel the heat from Latimer Road station. My car was parked by Latimer Road station. It was covered with bits of cladding and black stuff. We were lucky that we took the kids when we did, because the car got blocked in by fire engines.
36. The sound was too much. A lady was calling to me, saying "*Please help me. Please help*". I think she was Philippino. She said "*I'm going to die. Please --*" Then she was gone. She was in one of the middle floors. I could hear her when she was talking to us. Apart from the woman I described, I could see people flashing their lights on and off, and people waving what looked like flags.
37. I could see on my phone that Hanan's been calling me, but there had been no time to answer. I snuck back on to the ramp at Station Walk to see what was going on. Hamza, another of Hanan's brothers, found me, he said "*Bruv! We've been looking for you!*" We walked back towards the station. We saw [REDACTED], who is a friend of my daughter [REDACTED] [REDACTED] was talking to her friend in the Tower. I was right next to her and I could hear her friend down the phone. She was saying "*I'm dying. I'm going to die. The fire is reaching us.*" [REDACTED] was crying – that was her best friend.
38. Hanan and I went round to the park at the back of our house. We saw a Chinese man in the Tower, he was still alive. He was in the window, I could see him peering out.
39. Then I started running, I was scared, I thought the Tower was falling. Hanan said "*What are you doing?*" I said "*The Tower is falling*". I hadn't eaten, I hadn't slept. That was really scary. I saw the cladding falling down on our house. When it was falling it was still on fire and I thought it would catch the washing that was on the line and then our house would be on fire as well.

Media

40. We hadn't eaten or drank anything all night. I had had no sleep. I started feeling dizzy, so we sat in the car by Latimer Road station. Some of the ladies came and gathered around

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the car, they were talking to Hanan and she was showing them videos on her phone. There was an older man standing behind all the ladies. Hanan told me afterwards he said to her *"Do you want to sell it?"* It's ridiculous! I didn't hear him. People were dying and he was offering money. You can't replace people with money.

41. I was moving around the area all night, but I stayed on the station side of the Tower from this point onwards. Journalists started to arrive in the area. One said to me *"Can you send me your videos?"* I told him no, and he said *"This is my number. Think about it and call me"* and handed me his card.
42. I saw Yousef, stood on the corner by the bus stop opposite the Tower. He looked like he was in shock, he was just stood there looking at it. I turned to look at the Tower and I couldn't see anyone in the Tower now, just smoke and fire. I stayed with Yousef, we were joined by lots of people from the community. We were just stood around. We'd be chatting and journalists would come up next to us, and hide their recording devices down by their legs and say *"Did you see what happened?"*
43. I think it was about 7am that I spoke to Sky News. I let them interview me but I asked them not to show my face. Obviously, all of the people who knew me could tell it was me by the sound of my voice.

The immediate aftermath

44. We went to the church up the road. They were giving out blankets. They said *"If you want you can stay here, we'll give you a blanket."* I took the blanket and then I thought *"What am I going to do, sleep in the street?"* So I gave them the blanket back. They were offering drinks but I couldn't take one because I was fasting, so it must have been light outside. We were looking for people. We were told that some people were being found in the hospital.
45. At about 11am I thought that maybe I would go to Hanan's mum's house to rest, but when I got there I couldn't relax, so I came back – just to be there, and to see what was happening.



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46. There was a rumour going around that they were hiding the bodies from the Tower on Testerton Walk. No-one believed it, but then we heard it on the news. No-one on the ground knew anything about what was going on.
47. I found out that they had opened the Westway centre. I went there to rest but I couldn't relax. There was no privacy, there were people running around. I have a photograph of the Westway centre, which I exhibit as HC/29.
48. I went to the mosque and prayed, and then I stayed there to rest. I was in Hamza's clothes but they were too big for me. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] A lot of people were coming to the mosque. A man came and hugged me, he said "I thought you lived in the Tower." Hanan used to work in [REDACTED]
[REDACTED], so we know a lot of people in the area. They texted me or called me about Yousef.
49. We came to the [REDACTED] Hotel on the Friday. Until then I spent all my time in the Westway Centre or the mosque. There was me, my wife and our three kids – there wasn't enough room at Hanan's mother's house. Someone took our names and then called us – they said "We have a room at the [REDACTED] Hotel." We came at 12pm and were told the room wasn't ready. We got the key and came back later, and we have been living here ever since.

Contacting the emergency services

50. I confirm that I did not contact the emergency services at any stage.

Documents, photographs and related

51. There is now produced and shown to me the following videos recorded to my mobile phone during the night of 14 June 2017:

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Hicham Cherbika

Signed:



Dated:

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HC/01 – 01:08 – still photograph of the fire inside Flat 16. I am standing in front of the east side of the Tower, near the sport centre.

HC/02 – 01:09 – video footage of the fire inside Flat 16.

HC/03 – 01:09 - video footage of the fire inside Flat 16. The video shows one of the fire engines, and a firefighter on the ground level.

HC/04 – 01:11 – video footage of the fire inside Flat 16. The fireman is pulling a hose along the ground. I said “*Oh my god – it’s getting worse*”. The fire has spread to outside the window.

HC/05 - 01:12 – video showing the fire spread to outside the window. I say “Is it your flat?” and a male voice says “Yes”.

HC/05 – 01:12 - The fire has now spread onto the outside of the building. You can hear me say “*Eamon, what’s happening bruv?*” over the video.

HC/06 – 01:13 – video showing the fire spread to above the window, and to the floor above.

HC/07 – 01:15 – video showing the spread of the fire and the firefighter using the hose. A boy that I don’t know was next to me filming, I can hear him on the video telling the firefighter to go higher because the water couldn’t reach the fire.

HC/08 – 01:18 – further video showing the spread of the fire.

HC/09 – 01:19 – video showing the use of firefighter hose – I zoom in and you can see that the water doesn’t reach the fire.

HC/10 –01:21 – After the firefighters asked us to move back I filmed the Tower from further away. The fire is going up the building and around the side.

HC/11 – 01:26 - video showing fire spread across all of the right hand side of the Tower. The glass is dropping and the frames as well. The cladding is falling off the building and in the air. There is a lot of smoke.



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HC/12 – 02:22 – we are stood on the balcony of Grenfell Walk. There is a firefighter climbing a ladder to the Tower. I am asking Hanan for the car keys in Arabic.

HC/13 – 02:24 – I say “look, there’s people coming down” in Arabic. There is someone climbing out of the building down a ladder with two firefighters.

HC/14 – 02:33 – I am with Yousef on the end of the ramp. We are looking at the west side of the Tower. The fire is on the north side.

HC/15 – 02:41 – This video shows the same perspective as above. Yousef is on the phone, he says “All the building is going” [REDACTED]. “It’s starting from the fourth floor, and it’s going all the way up. The whole thing.”

[REDACTED]

HC/17 – 02:52 – I am standing opposite Latimer Road station. I can see the top of the floors of the Tower is on fire.

HC/18 – 03:15 - next to Latimer Road station. Shows Tower on fire. Video zooms in part way through. In one of the flats furthest to the right, 3 floors from top, you can see people in silhouette waving frantically. It looks like they are waving a flag. I say in Arabic “The fire is reaching them”.

HC/19 – 03:18 – this is a very short video of only a few seconds, in the same position at Latimer Road station.

HC/20 – 03:24 – We are at the corner of Latimer Road station. This is where I saw the lady vomiting, who I refer to at §32.

HC/21 – 03:32 – this is on the ramp on Grenfell Walk. We are pushed off the ramp by riot police, as I describe in §28.

HC/22 – 04:02 – video of Grenfell Tower in the early morning. I filmed this from the Rugby club. They had blocked off the roads near Latimer Road station.

HC/23 – 04:03 – similar footage to HC/22.



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HC/24 – 04:53 – video of the Tower taken from Bramley Road. The fire is still burning and there is lots of smoke.

HC/25 – 04:53 - zoomed in perspective of the above. There was so much smoke. I could see the firefighter using a hose.

HC/26 – 04:55 – This is still at Bramley Road, not far from the Westway. The Tower is in the background, still burning, and there are lots of ambulances.

HC/27 – 04:58 – I zoom in on the Tower to see the fire burning inside. This is near to where my friend Yousef lived in the Tower.

HC/28 – 05:19 – [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] This is where we saw the old man who survived, who I refer to at §38.

HC/29 – photograph of the sleeping arrangements at the Westway Centre.

52. I am currently obtaining my mobile phone billing records to establish the timing of some of the calls I refer to. I will file a further short statement if appropriate.

Statement of Truth

I confirm that the content of this witness statement is 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.

Signed: 

Date: 06-04-18

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Hicham Cherbika

Signed: 

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