

Witness Statement of: Hulya Deniz Yagci  
No. of statement: 1  
Exhibits:  
Date of statement: 5 June 2018

**GRENFELL TOWER PUBLIC INQUIRY**

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**WITNESS STATEMENT OF HULYA DENIZ YAGCI**

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I, HULYA DENIZ YAGCI, 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

2. I am a Core Participant to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry.
3. I moved into Testerton Walk when I was four years old. The property is a two bedroom maisonette and I lived there with my father, my mother, my brother, and my two children
4. The two bedrooms in our home are located on a lower level. The kitchen and living room are on the upper level. Our patio overlooks the communal gardens that are situated between Testerton Walk and Barandon Walk. From the patio and windows of the flat, you can see the side of the Tower which faces those communal gardens. The flat is close to Grenfell Tower.

14<sup>th</sup> June

5. I usually sleep on a sofa bed in the living room upstairs. My children would sometimes sleep with me and they would sometimes sleep in my parents' room. That night I had ended up falling asleep with the kids in my parents' room. I hadn't meant to fall asleep there but it had been a very long and stressful day.
6. There was a point during the night when I was aware of a consistent hammering sound. I was still half-asleep so I thought it might have something to do with the gas works that were on Bramley Road. The gas roadworks had been going on for a very long time with very little work actually being done. This was often a topic of conversation amongst the parents at the school as the commuters that were driving both from our community and those that were not. We had to use Sirdar Road, Treadgold Road and Whitchurch Road as alternative routes. The roads were constantly jammed up with cars trying to find an alternative route. Particularly at peak times. That same section of Bramley Road where the roadworks were, were still blocked on the night of the fire which consequently meant that one of the main roads leading up to Grenfell Tower was blocked so fire engines and other emergency vehicles could not drive through.
7. I was also vaguely aware of the sound of shouting in the background. I remember I did hear shouts of 'help' but I thought at first it might just be some drunk people being silly. The hammering sound continued and as I became more awake I realised it was someone banging on our front door. It had woken up my mum and dad as well.
8. My dad went to open the front door to find out what was going on. I followed him out into the corridor. It was one of our neighbours at the door. He told us not to panic but that there was a fire at Grenfell Tower and we needed to evacuate. I later found out that there had been two other sets of neighbours banging on our door at earlier points as well. We do not have a door bell, only the letterbox flap to knock with. I am not sure of the exact time we woke up; I think it might have been around 1.30am to 1.45 am.
9. After we were told about the fire we went up on the patio as we knew we would be able to see the Tower from there. I immediately saw the fire. There was a patch of fire

in the lower corner. I think it was around the fourth floor of the Tower. It was the corner between the side that faces the communal gardens and the side that faces the leisure centre. The first thing I noticed was that there were blue flames on the Tower. There were orange flames at the large patch of fire but there was a thin stream of blue flames going upwards. I thought because it was blue and the way it was going up vertically that the fire was going up the gas pipes. This was a great cause for concern as I was now not only worried about the fire spreading but also about possible explosions that would mean more people could potentially die or get badly hurt. It was decided as a family that we needed to leave our home and that we should get things ready to go. My parents quickly went back to see to the kids and to get them ready to leave. My brother and I stayed watching the fire for a bit longer.

10. I was aware that there had been fires at the Tower before but those had always been minor things that I had heard about after it had happened and I knew that those fires had always been contained in the property that the fire had started in. This is something I knew from living in the area. It was obvious from the beginning that this was not a normal fire. I had never seen anything like this before. I could tell that the patch of fire was at more than one flat. I was saying to my brother that the fire was everywhere and he was saying that it was going to be fine and that the firefighters were going to put it out. I thought that he was right and that the fire would be put out shortly but I was still worried. It was wishful thinking, a false hope, to think much could be done.

11. Part of the communal gardens that the flat overlooks that sits to the left of the middle footpath, is obscured by trees and as it was summer, the trees were very leafy. This is the part of the gardens which is closest to the Tower and Grenfell Walk. I could hear people closer to the Tower shouting things like 'you have to get out' but I couldn't see them from where I was. I could also hear people from the Tower screaming and shouting for help. When I hadn't been fully awake I had thought it was people messing around. When I realised what was going on, it was the cries for help that were the most vivid to me. It was awful hearing people crying for help knowing that there was nothing that you could do for them. It was like watching a horror movie in which our friends and neighbours were being burned alive by an inferno.

12. During the next 10 to 15 minutes, we were going around our home and grabbing things that we needed to take with us like our passports, money, water, blankets and things like that. My parents, my brother and I had gotten dressed. The kids were still in their night clothes. During that time I kept returning to the window and patio to look at the Tower. In those 10 to 15 minutes the fire had spread and seemed to have wrapped itself around the building. The fire was more like the usual red and orange flames that you would expect at this point. I was watching as the fire spread and I remember thinking it was odd how quickly it moved. When it was a patch in the corner, I was worried but I still thought that the emergency services would put it out. When I saw how quickly it was moving and spreading around the Tower, I was really terrified. I was less aware of any smoke or debris at that point. My focus was on the Tower and the people inside that I could hear calling for help. I was even more worried at that point that there would be many fatalities because the speed with which the fire was spreading was like nothing I had witnessed before.
13. We decided to go to Sirdar Road as that is where my dad had parked his car. The plan was for mum and dad, along with the children, to take the car and get out of the area. They could then get away from the Tower and shield the kids from what was going on. My brother and myself were going to stay in the area and try and help in any way we could. When we had got everything ready to leave we went out through Testerton Walk to the entrance that leads out to Whitchurch Road. That was the main entrance that we always used to get in and out of Testerton Walk. It is the entrance furthest from the Tower in Testerton Walk. We came out into the communal gardens that is between Testerton Walk and Hurstway Walk. As we rushed through Testerton Walk and into the communal gardens, I can't really remember if we saw anyone else leaving their properties. I don't know if it was because people already left or because I was so panicked trying to get my family to safety that I didn't notice.
14. I wanted to get my children out without them seeing everything that was going on. However we couldn't help but stop on the ramp to look at the Tower. I think we were stood there for around five minutes watching what was happening. I could still hear the screams and shouts coming from the Tower. It was very eerie. I could see the silhouettes of children at one of the windows. I think from their hair, they were two boys. From the size of them compared to the window, I thought one child was

probably five or six and the other was probably eight or nine. There was a glow behind them. After a while my brother said they were gone. I looked and he was right. I couldn't see them anymore. They had disappeared from the window. I don't know what happened to them. There were silhouettes of people at many of the windows that night. Many probably didn't make it and this is a fact that we have to try and come to terms with. I don't think we ever will though.

15. There was a man near the middle of the Tower who was waving something for attention. I think he was an elderly man. I also remember seeing the silhouette of someone at one of the windows waving a cloth. This was an image that ended up in the newspapers and it was confirmed by family members that this was Nadia Choucair. Nadia was the teaching assistant to my children. I hadn't even realised Nadia lived in the Tower at the time. It was so difficult seeing people signalling and crying for help when there is nothing that I was able to do for them. I felt so helpless. I was so worried for the people in the Tower. I was overwhelmed by the enormity of what was happening. I kept hoping that it was going to be okay, but knew that it probably wasn't going to be. The fire was spreading too quickly and from what we could see, nothing substantial was being done from the outside of the building. What I mean by that, is that we couldn't see firemen trying to hose down the flames. I later heard that the hoses that the firefighters had were only long enough to reach, I think it was the 7th floor. The water pressure I have heard was also not adequate to fight the fire.

16. There were two helicopters hovering by the building. I thought maybe they were going to take water from the Thames and drop it on the Tower, like something you would see in a film. I think now that I was naive, I don't even know if that would have worked even if it had been possible, but I just kept hoping that something was going to happen, that someone was going to come and save these people.

17. I hadn't really noticed the debris when I had been watching the fire on the patio. However outside, I did see a lot of flaming debris coming off the Tower. There were big chunks falling off the building. I wasn't worried that the Tower would fall but I was worried that there might be explosions. The Tower is on top of the heating system which powers the Tower as well as the Walkways. I wanted to get the kids away and to safety so we left to make our way to Sirdar Road.

18. My parents had intended to drive away from the immediate area but as we walked to where the car was parked on Sirdar Road we realised that driving anywhere was going to be impossible. On Sirdar Road there were at least four fire engines backed up. I think they had been unable to get any closer to the Tower. I heard the firefighters communicating on their walkie talkies.
19. We knew we couldn't drive anywhere but we weren't sure what to do next. We ended up finding a place on the pavement at Sirdar road to sit down. The kids sat on the bags that we had taken with us. The kids were really anxious about what was happening and I was trying to comfort them. I could see more of the Tower from Sirdar Road. I could see more of the side that faces the leisure centre as well as the side that faces the communal gardens. I was shocked by how the fire had spread. There were orange and yellow flames everywhere that you could see. My dad started to film the fire on his phone. I got him to stop quickly as the footage would be of people that potentially wouldn't make and I felt like it was disrespectful. We could still hear the screaming from the people in the Tower. It was awful. My children kept asking why the building was on fire and if the people were going to burn and die. They were also asking why the firefighters they could see were not trying to put out the fire. These were questions I was asking in my own mind as well, but how was I supposed to answer my children's questions?
20. My brother went off on his own very soon after we realised we wouldn't be able to drive from Sirdar Road. My brother wanted to walk around and see what was going on. Initially I stayed with my parents and the kids for around 15 minutes before deciding to go and see what was happening and if there was anything I could do to help. I couldn't sit and watch any longer. We decided that my parents would stay on Sirdar Road with the kids and that I would check in with them frequently. My brother and I never intended to leave the area anyway, we just wanted mum, dad and the children to get somewhere where they wouldn't be subjected to the horrific cries for help and seeing people come out of the fire. These images and voices will never leave me. I dread to think of the long term impact that this night will have on my children.

21. I started walking around. I stayed mainly near Grenfell Road near Barandon Walk. I also went around near to the Methodist church where the scene I was faced with was one of utter chaos and where I was able to see the Tower from another angle. My heart sank and I was overwhelmed yet again, by my fear that it would be a miracle if the people on the higher levels would be able to escape. All through this, alongside the cries of help and people in the building shouting out what floor they were on, were our cries screaming for them to get out.
22. I kept bumping into friends from the Walkways. We were hugging and comforting each other. I was gobsmacked by what has happened and I could see the shock and disbelief in other people's faces. One of my friends had come from Chelsea. She knew a Turkish family in the Tower. The family were also friends of ours as well that we had known for over twenty years. There were other people who were turning up who had friends and family in the Tower. There were constantly people asking 'have you see so-and-so?' I would speak to someone for a few minutes but I would always end up turning back towards the Tower. I was there for ages watching the Tower. I felt completely helpless. There was this overwhelming atmosphere of worry and disbelief.
23. At various points during the night, I went back to Sirdar Road to check on my parents and the kids. I also touched base with my brother at various points. After a few hours a drop off point was established on the green by Barandon Walk on Grenfell Road. People were dropping off water, food and blankets. I really wanted to help and I knew that we had some supplies at home. I quickly snuck back in to the property at one point to get my mum's medication. I also got some blankets and things to take to the drop off point.
24. At around 5am, St Clements Church opened its doors. At that point, I went and got my parents and the kids and settled them there. My brother had recently started a new job and he decided to go into work the morning following the fire. He had to go back home to get things he needed for work. I think he was escorted inside by the police. It was the morning, I think around 6am, when he went back inside. While he was at home, he called me and told me that he could see that there were people still alive in the building and that I had to tell the police to rescue them. I ran to a police officer at

the drop off point and he told me to tell police officer at St Clements Church. When I got there the police officer told me to tell a police officer somewhere else. I remember saying to the police officer, 'can't you make contact with them?' It was frustrating as it felt like nothing was being done to help those people.

### Aftermath

25. My parents left the Church to go to work at 6.30am or 7am. It was the day that they had to pay bills and my dad always tries to pay on time. It still wasn't possible to get anywhere by car so they took public transport. I stayed at the church with the kids until it was almost time for school to start. I remember thinking that I have to tell the school about the fire which I realised was silly afterwards because obviously they would have found out about it by then. At the time I wasn't thinking straight. I ended up taking the kids to school. It was open and I decided to let the kids stay there. At least they would have some normalcy there and I knew it was safe.

26. It was while dropping the children off at school that I found out Nadia lived in Grenfell Tower on the highest floor. I felt physically sick and unstable on my feet. Both myself and the teachers started to cry, but we had to pull ourselves together so as not to alarm the children. I was taken into the corridor where I spoke with the other teaching assistant that worked in Nadia's class with her. All of us at the school were in a state of shock, all trying to keep ourselves together so that the children would not get alarmed, all the while the fire was visible from the playground and we knew that as time went by, it would be less and less likely that there would be many survivors.

27. After dropping the kids off, I went back out to find out what was going on and if we were able to go back home and also most importantly, to see if there was anything I could do to help people. I wanted to find out if Nadia and her family were okay as well as to find out if there was any news on any other survivors. There was a really strong horrible smell of burning plastic in the air. It was a really artificial smell. I remember it being a very hot morning, with no breeze.

28. I ended up with other residents sitting outside the Baseline Business Centre on Grenfell Road. As we were all sitting on the slanted wall a youngster was going



around handing out water to us. This again stuck in my mind and made me proud of my wonderful community. I later came to find out that he and his family lived on Barandon Walk and two of the girls that I was sitting with were his sisters. We continued to sit together with many other people and at one point the young guy that was handing out water to us received a phone call and went crazy, standing up and screaming and crying 'No, no". I learnt that he had just found out that his best friend since childhood had passed away in hospital. He hadn't made it. His friend was Yasin El Wahabi. Yasin's uncle and aunt have been my friends since I was five years old. We all went to the same primary school and his uncle is like a brother to me. This was the reality of the fire. It felt surreal and devastating.

29. The Tower was still burning. The firefighters had been spraying it with water but it was like the hose was a toy. It wasn't doing anything. At one point firefighters finishing their shift came past us. Lots of people started clapping but I couldn't bring myself to clap. I felt in that moment that not enough had been done to save the people in the Tower. A few hours later I was so ashamed that I had thought that. A few days later I went to the fire station and I told them the way I'd felt at the time and how awful I felt about it afterwards. I thanked them for what they had done. I think any person that went into the fire that night, did so with the knowledge that there was a possibility that they would not come out alive. It was not a normal fire.
30. I did what I could to help our community over the next few days. We all helped at St Clements Church. Even my kids helped with labelling boxes. I felt it was really important to try and keep our community together and united. It was also important to try and keep busy because the minute I stopped, I could not cope with the enormity and horror of what was happening. I was exhausted, but had to keep going. I hadn't been able to help our friends and neighbours come out of the fire, but I wanted to do my best to help as much as possible in other ways.
31. I have lived in this community since I was a child and I knew many of the people who died in the fire. I was particularly affected by finding out that Nadia Choucair had died in the fire. She was the teaching assistant when my children were in Reception. She had been really lovely and my children adored her. Nadia was always the one who handed out the children's phonics books. I haven't been able to bring myself to

open the last one she gave me. I always get presents for the teachers each year and this year I got one for her too. I wrote her a card. I wrote to her about a dream that my daughter had told me about. My daughter's dreams since the fire have been awful but that dream was different. She said that she had seen Nadia dressed in white and Nadia had been happy. I broke down when she told me that. I said in my card that I was going to do my best to get justice for her. Her mum, husband and her children died with her. Three generations were wiped out in one night.

### Impact

32. On the night of the fire we had stayed up all night but the next night we weren't sure what to do. We almost ended up in temporary accommodation, but then we heard that people were being allowed back in to the flats. Initially we were told we could only enter the property to collect belongings. When we approached a police officer to ask about this, we were informed that we could actually go back in. We were escorted by a police officer to our flat. Despite what we had been through, and the fact that the Tower was still burning, we wanted to be back in our own environment with the things we knew. However it was really difficult to stay there. There was no gas and no hot water. We couldn't cook. We had to boil kettles to have a bath. I was taking care of my parents and my kids; two vulnerable age groups. After a while I noticed that we were all coughing when we were inside the property. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] It had felt important to stay in the property but I kept thinking that if my kids developed respiratory or other problems further down the line because I decided we should stay, I wouldn't be able to forgive myself.

33. The final incident that led to us leaving occurred when there was a scare at the property. Following the fire a sensor had been installed at the Tower to alert us if the Tower moved. I didn't hear it but I was told from a neighbour the alarm had sounded which signalled that the Tower had moved. I was also told by other residents that the police had evacuated the businesses in Baseline Studios but not any of the residents in the Walkways. When I spoke to a police officer initially he told me that the Tower hadn't moved. A police officer shortly afterwards told me that the Tower had moved. I didn't feel safe there anymore and I had lost my trust in the people who were supposed to be keeping us safe. We stayed in our property for six weeks following the

fire before I asked for us to be moved. We have been staying in temporary accommodation in a hotel since the end of July 2017.

34. Staying in a hotel was helpful in terms of having the basics such as being able to have a proper shower after so long without hot water. There were fire alarms in the room which made us feel safer and it was a much needed space to be able to feel safe. Whilst still at home I would not and could not sleep. I couldn't sleep because as soon as I closed my eyes I would get images of the fire and people at windows. I wouldn't sleep as I felt one person had to stay awake in case something happened again. However, the hotel is not a home. I used to love to cook for my family and now I can't do basic things like that anymore.
35. I have found it very difficult to sleep since the fire and I do not remember the last time I felt rested. I am exhausted and I am still trying to get my head around what has happened and what continues to happen in the aftermath. I keep remembering that on the night of the fire, it was three sets of neighbours knocking on our door before we woke up. The police never came to evacuate us. I have heard from other residents that they knocked on other doors, but the police did not knock on ours.
36. After the fire I was rushing around trying to sort things out for my family, going to meetings and the Grenfell marches and generally trying to find out what was going on. There was no information or contact from the authorities whatsoever. It was utter chaos and abandonment. The community came together in such a way, particularly in those first few weeks, it was overwhelmingly beautiful. We only had to look at one another and we knew what each other's pain was. I have lost count of the number of times a person that I did not know saw the pain in my face and came up to give me a hug. I can never begin to explain how much that shoulder to cry on meant to me. The whole area was in a state of shock and disbelief. The whole thing seemed surreal, yet this was the horrific reality that had brought us together even more. I had lost my appetite completely and was living mainly on water and some fruit as I couldn't stomach any food. I felt like a zombie.

37.

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] I have to walk past their old reception class on my way up to the [REDACTED]

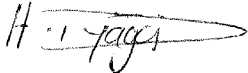
room. It is still so difficult to walk past the class and not see Nadia there. Now it hurts to walk down that corridor. One day she was there, the next she was gone. I think about the lives we had before the fire and the lives we have now. I know our lives will never be the same again. We are in turmoil both emotionally and in terms of stability.

38. I don't want to go into further detail here about the impact that fire has had on me and my family. I understand that I will be allowed an opportunity to speak about these matters at a later date. I want to make a further statement as part of Phase 2 to discuss in more detail the aftermath of the fire.

### **Statement of truth**

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

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

Signed: 

Dated: 5<sup>th</sup> June 2018