

IN THE MATTER OF THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

STATEMENT OF IBTISAM ALFAWAZ

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 Hurstway Walk at the time of the fire and I witnessed the early stages of the fire spreading and the emergency response. I had direct involvement with a number of the Grenfell Tower residents, including those who sadly passed away.
3. Please note, as there are two people mentioned in this statement called [REDACTED] a friend and my daughter, I will refer to my daughter by her full name, [REDACTED] and my friend simply as [REDACTED]

Personal background

4. I was born on [REDACTED] 1976. I came to the UK alone from Iraq in 2002. Initially I lived with my uncle for 3-4 months. I lived in a number of different properties and then moved to Hurstway Walk in 2010. I lived there up until the fire.
5. I have five children: [REDACTED] - [REDACTED]; [REDACTED] - [REDACTED] - [REDACTED] is [REDACTED], [REDACTED] - [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] who is [REDACTED].
6. I am currently living with my five children in temporary accommodation at [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Living in Hurstway Walk

7. I lived at [REDACTED] Hurstway Walk with my five children.
8. [REDACTED]

I

Ibtisam Alfawaz

Signed: [REDACTED]

Dated: 20-04-18

9.

10.

11. [REDACTED] was a two-floor maisonette, downstairs was my bedroom, the living room and the kitchen. Upstairs I had two bedrooms and the bathroom. It was situated on the ground and first floor of the block.

12. I loved living in Hurstway Walk. I loved the community we had. My children had all of their friends living next to them. They would all play together in the playground just outside Grenfell Tower. I would be able to watch them playing from the windows in my flat, so I would tell them to go play whilst I cleaned the house. I did not worry about their safety whilst they were out playing because I knew the neighbours would look after them. I always saw Nur Huda El-Wahabi looking after my sons, she was like a tomboy so enjoyed playing football with the boys. Sometimes I would join my children when they played in the playground as a lot of the mothers from the area would meet there. We would talk about everything, we would always try make jokes out of any problems we were having in our marriages or how naughty our children were. We will never be able to get a community like that again.

Visiting the Tower

13. I visited Grenfell Tower once. I went to the reception area only as I had to get another fob for my building and the office in which I had to do this was in the Tower.

Fire Safety

14. I would often sit in the playground just outside the Tower whilst my children played. Many of the mothers from the Tower and the Walkways would meet there and discuss everything from marriage to just making jokes and laughing. The Tower was sometimes a discussion we had. Nadia, a resident of the Tower who passed away, and Mona another resident and survivor of the Tower would complain to me about the building. Nadia would tell me the lifts were not working and she would have to use the stairs. Nadia was scared for her children's safety because she felt the windows were not safe as a child had fallen from a window. However, eventually the windows were changed and had a safety

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latch on them to stop them opening too wide. Nadia had told me that she complained to the council about the lifts not working but I do not know exactly what was said. I often said to Mona that I would not want to live in the Tower because of how high it is and that if an emergency ever happened how would people get out.

15. I did not ever complain to the council about my concerns.

Modifications to the Tower

16. Before the fire I did not have any concerns regarding the modifications to the Tower.

13 June 2017 and the hours leading up to the fire

17. As it was Ramadan, my friend Fatima and her 22-year-old daughter Alina were at my house. Fatima, [REDACTED] and I were all sitting in the living room which faces the Tower. My sons [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were all sleeping in their room upstairs which also faces the Tower.
18. At around 12:45am, [REDACTED] said to me "There's a fire." [REDACTED] then messaged her friend Jessica from the Tower asking if there was a fire and whether she was okay, she responded saying that she was fine but was going to go check on her father who lived on a higher floor to her.
19. I thought I should go and see what was going on as I had a lot of friends in the Tower so wanted to see if I could help anyone. I left the house with [REDACTED] and Fatima, leaving Alina at home to look after my sons who were still sleeping. We all left the house in just our pyjamas.
20. When we left the house, the fire was still only on the corner of the side of the building that faces the school.¹ At this point there was no noise, we could not hear any screaming, it was quiet I could not hear any fire alarms. It did not look like it was going to be a big fire. I could not see that much smoke.
21. I saw my friend Hanan outside and she told me it was just the kitchen of the flat that was on fire. We agreed that we should start buzzing on the intercoms to warn people to come outside.

¹ I have now been told that this is the north side of Grenfell Tower

22. We saw a firefighter just outside the Tower near to where the Grenfell Tower bins are and asked him if we could press on the intercoms to tell people to come out as at this time the fire looked like it was still small enough for people to get out safely. The firefighter told us we were not allowed to go near the Tower and could therefore not buzz on the intercoms. I then asked if they could do it themselves and buzz on the intercoms to wake up the residents, but I was ignored by the firefighter. This made me very suspicious as to why they did not want to wake the residents up. The fire was still only on the corner that faces the school at this point.
23. Slowly, the residents started to come out. There was one resident that was outside screaming for her husband who was in the Tower. I heard her ask a firefighter if she could use a fire extinguisher to help put it out inside, he responded saying "*This is not your job you need to take your children and go*".
24. The firemen and police tried to move us away from the Tower. There was a policeman that I could see through the staircase window, he had his hands up as if he was signalling stop to the residents that were coming down the stairs. I do not remember which floor he was on. The fire still had not spread very much when this was happening, it was still mostly just on the corner that faces the school. There was not much smoke and the smoke that was there was not that dark in colour, the smoke at this time was much lighter than it was later on in the night. I could not see any smoke inside the building at this point, so I did not know why the policeman was sending the residents back up.
25. The police told us and other residents that were outside that we needed to leave the area as the fire started getting larger and the cladding was flying towards us all onto the floor and around the area. I cannot be certain but I think it must have been around 1:30 at this point because my friend called me shortly after to tell me that it was *imsak* (the time the fast starts) time soon so I should drink something before the fast starts again.
26. [REDACTED] called 999 asking for more people to come and help. The operator said they have already sent engines and that they could not hear her properly due to the background noise. I do not remember what time it was when she called but I know it was after we were told to leave the area by the police. As her phone is pay as you go and she has changed numbers since the fire, I am unable to get hold of the phone records to check what time the call was made. The fire at this point had grown but it had not spread that far up the building, it looked as if it was only on a few floors, maybe reaching around the sixth floor.

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Dated: 20-06-18

27. As the fire grew, everyone was in shock. I did not feel like it was real. I did not know what I was doing, I did not even know if I was wearing a scarf or not. Walah asked me *"Is this real, they cannot stop it?"* I just tried to reassure her but inside I did not know if the firefighters would be able to stop it.
28. [REDACTED] was crying and scratching her face at the same time, she was so upset and scared about her friends in the Tower.
29. Shortly after at around 2am, I started shouting to the people around me *"This fire isn't going to stop we need to leave,"* then a policeman started doing the same. I realised that the fire was out of control. The cladding was flying towards us and the flames looked like hell. They were an orangey black colour. The smoke was so bad. I could feel the heat on my face. The whole building was on fire at this point. I could see people in the window on the higher floors towards the top of the building waving for help. I could see three children with an adult, I am not sure if it was a man or woman adult, they were waving a light that looked like a phone torch. I cannot remember exactly what floor they were on, but they were near the top of the building. This made it clear to me that this fire was not going to get put out.
30. Once this happened I knew I had to go get my children from my flat. I went back to the flat alone leaving [REDACTED] with Fatima. My flat is less than a two-minute walk away from Grenfell Tower. I went back upstairs to my flat and woke my sons up. When I entered my flat I could smell the smoke and smell plastic burning but I could not see any smoke in my house. I told Alina to help me to get my kids out of the house. [REDACTED] woke up and saw the fire straight away, I wish I did not let him see it, I wish I covered his eyes or made him face the other way. I spent around 5 minutes in my flat.
31. Whilst I was inside my flat there was a policeman in the outside corridor shouting *"Everyone needs to evacuate from the building."*
32. I knocked on my neighbour's door. He is a disabled man, so I was worried about him and wanted him to come out, but he was not answering the door. I told the policeman that was near my flat about him and that he would need help getting out, the policeman said, *"We will sort it out"*. I do not recall seeing my neighbour again after that.
33. I left the house with only my car key and my jacket on.
34. I gave Fatima my children and told them to go back to her house in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] did not want to go with her as they wanted to stay and wait

for their friends to come out, but I made sure that they went. It was around 3am at this point, I know this because when Fatima got home her daughter sent me a picture of my kids and the time stamp said 3:25am

35. My friend Hanife Macit who lived on the 16th floor managed to come out unaided around 4am with her husband Sener Macit. She told me that her husband called the fire brigade several times from when the fire started, they told him to stay put and that they were doing what they could. The final time they called 999 the operator said to them *"Sorry the fire is out of our hands you need to come out"*. They covered themselves with wet towels and managed to come out. Hanife told me that on her way down she was stepping over bodies and that at one point someone that was lying on the floor touched her leg, meaning the person was alive and could have been saved if the firefighters went up.
36. The fire continued to burn. I could only see water on one side, the side that the school was on. The hose was not controlled manually, it was just left there pointing at the building. It only reached around halfway up the building. The fire was worse higher up and on the other sides, I do not know why there was only water on that side and not reaching the top. There did not seem like there was enough of an attempt to put out the fire.
37. Whilst outside I heard the voice of the man that threw himself out his window and the sound he made when he hit the ground. That sound will never leave me.
38. The screams of everyone both in the Tower and outside were like they were from hell. There were children crying and screaming *"Help"*.

Fire spreading

39. When I first came outside the fire was only on the corner that faces the school, in the space of just a few hours half the building was on fire. The fire was moving around the building like a spiral. The flames were orange and blue.
40. The smoke was thick and smelt very strong. It was black in colour.
41. I could feel the heat from the flames, it felt as if I had just opened an oven door and stood next to it.
42. The cladding was flying off the building, when it would land on the floor it looked like a human's hair.

Firefighters

43. The firefighters kept pushing us back and not allowing us to help. They kept telling us *"This is not your job."* I did not see a sense of humanity from them. They did not go in and help, we usually have strong firemen, where were they the night of the fire? They did not appear to be working hard, they did not look like they were doing their job properly.
44. The firefighters did not resolve the problem. I could not see any organisation between them which makes me worried about our lives should this happen again. I do not trust them anymore.
45. At around 3 or 4am, I saw a firefighter near me on Lancaster Road that was changing his clothes, but he was not rushing to do this. I understand they have to be calm but that does not mean he should be moving slow. The fire was getting worse at this point, it seemed as if each second that went by the fire grew more and more.
46. I shouted to the firefighters if they could put more water on the building, but they would just respond telling me to move away.
47. I could see that the fire engines had limited access to the building. Before the school next to Grenfell Tower was built, there was more space around for cars to access the area. After the school was built all this space was closed off meaning the fire engines found it difficult to get closer to the building.
48. The firefighters would speak to me very rudely when I spoke to them. The few times I tried to speak to them they would ignore me or not give me proper answers. I asked a firefighter *"Why are you not opening more water"* he responded saying *"We are looking for the water underground"*. They were often standing around doing nothing, I do not understand what they were waiting for.
49. There were helicopters circling the building, but instead of helping the residents that were screaming for their help they just filmed them. I do not know why there were no helicopters around to spray water at the building or provide a ladder to help the people escape.
50. Normally, when you see a firefighter coming out of a building that is on fire, they are covered in black marks from the smoke. The firefighters I saw on that night were still

quite clean, which showed me that they did not go into the building or did not go deep in enough.

51. It looked as if the community did more to help the residents than the firefighters did.

The morning of 14 June

52. Fatima came back after she dropped my children at her house. I stayed outside with Fatima until around 7am thinking that they were going to stop the fire. We were next to Latimer Road Station as the police had evacuated us from the area. We were standing next to a shop called Bugsy. I could hear people screaming for help, noises I do not want to remember now. The smell was one that I have never smelt before, it smelt like burning flesh. I could feel the heat from the fire on my face. The smoke was very thick and a dark black colour. There was a lot of ash coming onto us where we were standing. Pieces of cladding were also flying around towards us onto the floor and onto surrounding buildings. I had a terrible taste in my mouth, it was just a disgusting taste that I have not tasted before. My throat felt so dry and painful.
53. We then went to Fatima's house in [REDACTED] to check on my children that went with her. I stayed there all day and slept there on the night of the 14 June. The next day I went to my sister's house in [REDACTED]. My children kept asking me "*Is this a dream, why are we not going to school?*" I tried to relax at my sister's house and tried to sleep, but me and my daughters could not. [REDACTED] was very anxious as she was waiting to hear about her friend Jessica, she kept getting mixed messages about her, some people were saying she is alive, others said she is missing or she is at the hospital.

Re-entering Hurstway Walk

54. At around 1pm on 14th June I left my Fatima's house alone to go back to my house, I managed to reach the gardens behind my house but was stopped by the police. I told them I need to pick up [REDACTED] but the policeman said, "*No you cannot go inside,*" [REDACTED]
55. I tried to re-enter my house on the 17th June but was stopped by a housing officer. I told him "*It has been three days that I have been left with no clothes and not even my bank cards.*" He then allowed me to enter but only gave me five minutes to pick up whatever I could and then leave. I asked if he could come in and help me, but he refused and

continued to wait outside. I picked up some clothes and me and my children's documents such as our passports.

Assistance after the fire

56. I visited the relief centres nearly every day after the fire. My main reason for going was for housing and to meet with the survivors from Grenfell Tower and other members of the community.
57. On the 15th June, after being refused entry into my house, I went to back to my sister's house. On the 16th June I went to the St Clements James Centre to see which survivors were there. I met a lady called Alison, she was very kind and offered her home to me and my children. I said there was no need as I was staying at my sister's house at that time. After that I went to Westway with my friend Hanan as she recommended I speak to the council representatives that were there. There were social workers there and I told them that my children are handling this very badly and I need help particularly with my daughters who [REDACTED] after the fire. They told me that they will help but did not tell me exactly what they would do to help. I also told them that I needed accommodation as I have not been let back inside my house, they took my number down and said that they would contact me once they had something available.
58. I then received a call from Alison saying that she has found accommodation for me and my children. I was offered a booking in Thistle Hyde Park Hotel. We stayed there for two months.
59. St Clements James Centre was the organisation that helped me the most. They gave me £500 and offered clothes for me and my children. I did not want to accept the clothing as I still had all my clothes in my property and felt the residents of Grenfell Tower were more deserving of it. I felt like they helped me without me having to ask for the help first.
60. After two months at the hotel the council gave me an apartment in [REDACTED], however the property had a lot of issues including leaks, damp and mice. I stayed there for two weeks and told my keyworker that I have to move as the damp was affecting my son [REDACTED]. When my keyworker came to visit, whilst sitting down, a mouse ran under her legs. At that point she apologised for putting us in this property and organised for us to move as a matter of an emergency. We were then put back into a hotel for another two months until I moved to my current property.

Ibtisam Alfawaz

Signed:



Dated: 20-04-18

61. [REDACTED] had an important exam that week, which she went to even though she was not in the right state of mind to do it. She was very upset and did not want to sit her exam as she used to revise with some of her friends from Grenfell Tower who passed away, so she felt uncomfortable doing the exam without them. Her school, [REDACTED], closed due to the fire and so the examinations were taking place in a different school building. I told [REDACTED] that I did not want her to take the exam as she was not ready, but they said that she needed to do it and that she should just try her best. There was no support offered to her during her examinations.

Medical assistance after the fire

62. [REDACTED]

Other matters


63. I have not made any other statements.
64. I was interviewed by The Guardian. I give you permission to contact them to obtain a copy.
65. If necessary, I am willing to speak in court.
66. If the Inquiry needs to contact me again then I am happy for them to.

Exhibits

67. Please note I do not have any timestamps of the pictures as they have been transferred from my daughter's mobile onto her iPad and as her phone has since been replaced I therefore do not have the original timestamps
68. There is now produced and shown to me the following videos recorded to Walah and Fatima's phones during the night of 14 June 2017:
- IA/01 – Video footage filmed whilst we were standing next to Buggy
- IA/02 – Video footage filmed from the outside corridor of Grenfell Walk, you can see the water doesn't reach that high up the building

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Ibtisam Alfawaz

Signed: 

Dated: 26-04-18

IA/03 – Video footage filmed outside the leisure centre, the cladding can be seen falling off the building

IA/04 – Video footage filmed from just under the main door of the Tower

IA/05 – Video footage filmed from between KAA school and the leisure centre

IA/06 – Video footage filmed from Lancaster Road

IA/07 – Video footage filmed from Lancaster Road near Barandon Walk

IA/08 – Video footage filmed just next to the Tower, not far from the leisure centre

IA/09 – Video footage filmed from Lancaster Road near Barandon Walk

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.

Signed: 

Dated: 20-04-18

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Signed: 

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