

IN THE MATTER OF THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

STATEMENT OF ISMAIL HADGAY

Preamble

1. I make this statement from my own personal knowledge and from information that I have been told by others. Where the information does not come from my own personal knowledge, I make this clear below.
2. I make this statement as a former resident of [REDACTED] Testerton Walk, who witnessed the fire at Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017. I knew a number of people who lost their lives as a result of the fire.
3. I had been a resident at [REDACTED] Testerton Walk for around 11 years when the fire at Grenfell Tower happened. As a result of the fire, the community that me and my family once knew on the Lancaster West Estate has been badly affected, and we, like other residents, have had to live in alternative accommodation in a hotel. In the last 3 weeks, we have been moved out of our hotel accommodation and into a flat which is also only temporary accommodation. We were traumatised by the tragedy and feel uncomfortable moving back to Testerton Walk, which is near to the Tower.
4. I have not given a statement to the police in connection to the fire at Grenfell Tower. I have however given an interview to an Italian TV news channel, although I have not actually watched it. That interview was given in the morning of 14 June 2017 and took place live at the scene. I was asked about what was happening at the time.
5. I am originally from Eritrea in East Africa and moved to the UK with my wife, Fatima Faraj, in [REDACTED]. We moved to [REDACTED] Testerton Walk on 1 June 2006 and became friends with a number of people who lived in Grenfell Tower. My family and I attend an [REDACTED] in Vauxhall. I think that a lady named Nura also went there with her family. She lived in Grenfell Tower with her husband, daughter and two sons and was good friends with my wife. Everyone seemed to know Nura. Her children were lovely and I remember that they once recited the Quran very well indeed. Nura died with her husband and children in the fire.

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6. [REDACTED] I knew a Sudanese lady called Fathiah who lived in Grenfell Tower, who I would say, 'hi' to in the mornings whenever I saw her. I think that her surname was Alsanousi. I believe that she was in her 70's and I thought of her as a mother figure. She died in the fire at Grenfell Tower together with her son and daughter.
7. There was also a Moroccan family who lived in the Tower. Their daughter, who I believe was called Nadia Wahab, died as a result of the fire. My children knew her from school.
8. A friend of mine [REDACTED] named Hassan, lost his wife, Rania Ibrahim, and their 2 children. Another friend, Nura Jamal also died together with her husband, Nashim Kidir.
9. As a Muslim who is familiar with the Al Manaar Mosque in West London, I knew and mixed with Muslims from lots of different nationalities from the Lancaster West Estate. We were like a big family. At Ramadan, after eating our *iftar* meal, my family and I would go to the Mosque to pray and then talk to our friends after prayer. Now that we are not living in the area, we feel a great loss. We have been cut off from our community and do not know where our friends are living now. We live far away from the Mosque. When my children ask me when we will return to the Mosque to see our old friends, I do not have any answers for them.

Personal background

10. I was born on [REDACTED] and am [REDACTED] years of age. [REDACTED]
11. I am married to Fatima Faraj (D.O.B [REDACTED]) and we have 4 children:
- a. Wail Hadgay, a boy (D.O.B [REDACTED]), aged [REDACTED]
 - b. Waleed Hadgay, a boy (D.O.B [REDACTED]), aged [REDACTED]
 - c. [REDACTED] a boy (D.O.B [REDACTED]) aged [REDACTED] and
 - d. [REDACTED], a girl, (D.O.B [REDACTED]) aged [REDACTED]

Testerton Walk

12. I moved to [REDACTED] Testerton Walk with my wife and 4 children in June 2006. The property is a 3 bedroom flat in a 2-storey building. There is 1 bedroom on the ground floor along with a kitchen and a sitting room. Upstairs, there are 2 more bedrooms and a bathroom. We also have a balcony, and when you go out onto it, you can see Grenfell Tower. Having lived there for the past 11 years,

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we are very familiar with the area and enjoyed the community which was made up of several different faiths.

13. My 2 eldest sons, Wail and Waleed, had the downstairs bedroom whilst my wife and I shared one of the bedrooms on the first floor. My son [REDACTED] and his sister, shared the other bedroom. We found that, as the bedrooms were so narrow, we had to have bunk-beds in the children's bedrooms rather than 2 single beds.
14. I had a secure tenancy with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, or RBKC as they are known. I never had any problems with RBKC but did experience issues with the Tenant Management Organisation (TMO) because they provided a poor service to tenants. When we moved to our flat in Testerton Walk, we liked it. We had raised some concerns about damp when we first viewed the property but we were told that it would be sorted out and painted before we actually moved in. We therefore accepted the property as we thought that the problems with damp would be resolved before we moved in.
15. When we moved in, however, we found that the problem had not been fixed properly. The damp in our bedroom had simply been painted over. I then found that I had a leak in my bedroom. It took between 2 and 3 years of me complaining before anything was done to put it right. In the end, I had to instruct a solicitor to help me to get the repairs done to the property. Water would leak into my property and, at one point, I had to stop using the electricity for about a week, because I thought that it was too dangerous to continue to use it.

16.

[REDACTED]

17.

[REDACTED]

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Fire safety

18. 

19. When I used to think about access on the estate, I used to think to myself, '*If there was a fire, how would a fire engine ever reach the flats in the area?*' I thought this, because if you are on Whitchurch Road, you cannot access Testerton Walk by car. Grenfell Road would give you access to Grenfell Walk, but no further.
20. The block of flats on Testerton Walk has 2 exits; one on the north side and one on the south side. In the event of a fire, those living in the middle of the block, would find it difficult to flee quickly and easily, especially if they are elderly or disabled. It would be possible to take the steps down to the communal gardens to get away from the block in the event of a fire, although this option would not be open to the disabled.
21. I do not remember anybody from the Council telling residents what to do in the event of a fire. 4 or 5 years ago smoke alarms were fitted in our flat. However, I do not know whether there were or are any sprinklers in our block at Testerton Walk. I never saw the Fire Brigade Service do any testing to ensure that it was fire safe and I did not notice any signs about fire safety.
22. The communal areas in Testerton Walk have wooden doors with glass panels, which get broken on a weekly basis. They close automatically with a magnetic lock. We report the broken doors to the Council and they are replaced. A gang of boys from other areas regularly damage the door at the main entrance and have easy access to Testerton Walk as a result. Residents are supposed to gain access using a fob key but usually the main door to the block is unlocked as it has been damaged by boys from other estates who, once inside, drink alcohol and smoke cannabis. I worry about my

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children and tell them that they should ignore the gang of boys and go straight into our flat without looking at them. It is not safe.

23. Before 14 June 2017, the doors inside my flat were normal, wooden doors and not fire doors. Since the fire at Grenfell Tower, the Council have replaced the doors with fire doors, accessing my flat without my permission. Me and my family feel scared by the Council's decision to change the doors because it shows that the previous ones were unsafe. Fires can happen entirely by accident and at any time; it is the Council's responsibility to ensure that we, as residents, are safe, and I fear that before 14 June 2017, our flat was not safe.

24. I have noticed that following the fire at Grenfell Tower, there is now a red box at the entrance of Testerton Walk which was not there before. Inside the red box there is a hose and a grey box marked, 'Fire.' Although I no longer live at [REDACTED] Testerton Walk as I am staying in temporary accommodation, I go back regularly to collect belongings for me and my family. I have also noticed a red cable which runs around the building which could be a small hose or possibly the cable for an alarm system.

Renovations at Grenfell Tower

25. I was a member of the TMO residents' forum. By paying a £10 membership fee, residents could register with the forum and attend meetings. I joined the forum in June 2006. Meetings were held every couple of months. However, when I went to the meetings, I found that I had no real power as a member. The discussions centred around the financial year, how much money had been spent and how much money had been set aside for future spending. I remember one meeting in which the TMO talked about repairing the roads. I did not think that it was a serious forum which gave me, as a resident, a voice. I did not believe that the forum provided me with any real power to make positive change within my community. I stopped attending the meetings as it seemed like a waste of time. No action was being taken afterwards by the TMO. I felt as though most things that were discussed were ignored.

26. A few years ago, a boy living in a flat on or around the 14th floor of Grenfell Tower lost his life when he fell from a window. The windows in the Tower were not secure and some of them would slide open completely. It was extremely sad that this boy fell to his death. He was in the same school as my children. After that incident, the Council changed the design of the windows, so that they were secured with a key and a chain, which prevented them from flying open and posing a risk of death.

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27. When the Council decided to build the Academy 4 years ago on the estate, I thought that it would be good for the area. At one stage, I thought that my son, who is currently doing his GCSE's, could have attended the Academy to study his A' levels. However, since the fire at Grenfell Tower, I am concerned that it may have been built with the same cladding as that used on the Tower and I am worried that it is therefore unsafe.
28. I believe that the cladding on Grenfell Tower was put on the exterior nearly two and a half years ago. I remember seeing the scaffolding around the Tower and that the work was completed within a few months. I thought that it looked very nice once it was completed.
29. The TMO's main office was at the bottom of Grenfell Tower and therefore I had been inside the Tower in connection with any issues that I had with my rent, my keys or repairs. However, I only visited the TMO's office and had not actually been inside the residential block of the Tower. I am therefore unable to confirm whether there were any fire safety measures in place at Grenfell Tower. However, I know that the TMO that managed Testerton Walk was the same TMO that managed Grenfell Tower and therefore I believe that the issues that my block experienced in relation to fire safety will be similar to those experienced in Grenfell Tower.

14 June 2017

30. I would usually be asleep at 12.30 am. However, on 14 June 2017, it was Ramadan and I had attended the [REDACTED] with my two eldest sons, Wail and Waleed, [REDACTED]. After this, we drove home and parked the car on Whitchurch Road before walking back to our flat. When I entered my flat, I could hear voices outside and I assumed that it was the gang of boys from other estates that regularly hang out in the corridor, smoking and drinking. I did not think that the sound of the voices outside was anything unusual at that stage. After about 15 minutes, I noticed that the noise level had increased and so I opened the doors of my balcony to find out what was going on. From the balcony, I could see the north side of the Tower. I noticed smoke coming out of the building and could hear lots of noise; screaming and sirens. I could not, however, see any fire. I decided to leave my flat, using the southern exit of Testerton Walk, coming out onto Grenfell Walk. At that point, I could still not see any fire. At or around 1.00 am, I turned left towards Latimer Road Station so that I could see the other side of Grenfell Tower. I could now see a fire on or around the 4th floor. Red flames were eating the cladding and I could hear a 'Shhhhhhhh' noise. The flames were going straight up, and very quickly. There is now produced

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and shown to me as exhibit 'IH1' a video which shows the nature and extent of the fire. At that point, I believed that the Fire Brigade would be able to put the fire out.

31. When I arrived at Grenfell Tower, the Fire Brigade Services were already there. I saw that firefighters were taking a ladder from Grenfell Walk to the ground floor of Grenfell Tower so that they could enter the building. I helped them to put the ladder up which reached the 3rd floor of the Tower. I watched one of the fire fighters go into the Tower. He stayed in the building for about 5 minutes before coming out again. Because the Fire Brigade Services were there, I believed that they would rescue the residents inside the building. I could see people inside the Tower. They were opening their windows and shouting at us, begging us to help them. Some tenants were screaming, 'God help us!' and panicking. Various people were shouting in their own languages. The police and the fire fighters told people not to worry, saying, 'Stay there! We're coming to get you.' I could see that some people in the Tower were tying their clothing in an attempt to make a rope so that they could get out of the building. I shouted up at the people that I could see in the Tower, 'Don't jump! Stay put -- they will rescue you. Don't jump!'
32. At approximately 1.00 am I saw a helicopter which appeared to be taking pictures or recording. I am still unsure about exactly what the helicopter was doing. I thought that it was going to be used to rescue people but it was not. It was still there later on in the morning, at around 11.00 am. The helicopter was flying around above the Tower.
33. I could hear a fire alarm sounding but I do not know where it was coming from. It was very confusing as I could hear a mixture of different sirens from various services.
34. The police were present outside the Tower and were trying to control the crowd which was growing. In the crowd there were people who had family and friends living in the Tower. These people were becoming angry because they wanted to ensure that their loved ones were rescued from the fire. The police called for support from the military police in order to control the crowd. The police physically pushed the crowd back and we were forced to move away from the area. By now there must have been hundreds of people in the crowd. I realised at that point that very few people were actually coming out of Grenfell Tower and understood that many of the residents may not be rescued.
35. The air smelt badly of smoke. The smoke was dark in colour and foggy, and sometimes was white in colour too. Those of us in the crowd had to put our hands over our mouths because the smell was

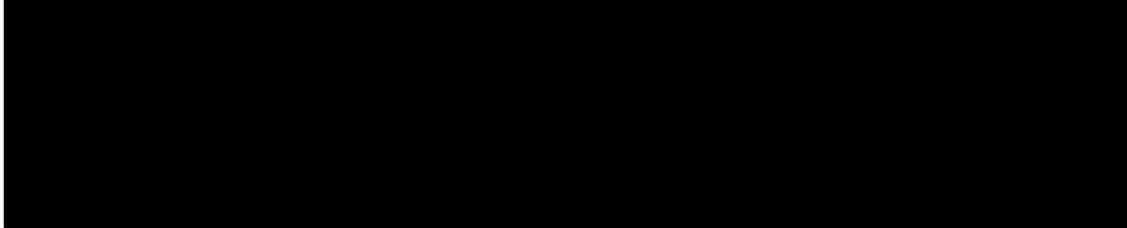
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so awful. I was coughing at the time and still have a cough, but do not know for certain whether it is connected to the smoke that I breathed in on 14 June 2017. Explosions were coming from the Tower. The noise was booming. The flames seemed to be eating the building's material and small pieces were falling down from the Tower itself.

36. My sons and I moved away from the Tower, taking a main road through to Latimer Road Station.



37. At around 3.00 am, I was still next to Latimer Road Station. I could see people on the top floors waving for help. Their lights were still on in their flats and so I could see them waving, clearly. I thought to myself, *'There are a lot of people inside the Tower that cannot possibly be rescued.'*

38. The fire grew and grew and surrounded the Tower. When the police realised the extent of it, they came to Testerton Walk with equipment to enter peoples' properties by force. I think that this was at around 2.30 am. They pushed open residents' front doors as they were sleeping so that they could leave their properties. Before they arrived at my front door, I had returned to take my wife and children, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], to safety. My daughter, [REDACTED] was asleep at the time [REDACTED] I had to carry her out of our flat. [REDACTED] My wife was crying; she could not speak. I told her that everything was okay. I took my wife, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] to my car on Whitchurch Road and they stayed inside it until the next morning, when I arranged for them to sleep at a friend's house. In the meantime, I together with my 2 eldest sons tried to help people in the crowds. Members of the Al Manaar Mosque provided water and snacks, like crisps, which I helped to distribute to those in the area.

The response of the emergency services

39. There must have been 20 fire engines or more that night. They should have been able to drive down the main road, Bramley Road, but they could not. This is because it had been closed off in the middle, at the junction to Whitchurch Road, for about 3 weeks, so that works could be done to address a gas leak. This affected the fire fighters' ability to do their work. Instead of going down Bramley Road, the fire engines had to go through Whitchurch Road, around to St. Mark's Road and

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through to Latimer Road. All of the police cars, fire engines and ambulances came to Latimer Road and had to walk to the Tower in order to respond to the fire. There were lots of cars in the area which meant that the emergency services struggled to do their work. There is now produced and shown to me exhibit 'IH1' which is a video recording of where the fire engines were parked.

40. There were plenty of fire engines on the night of the fire. I saw fire fighters going into the Tower and coming out with smoke covering their faces. They seemed angry when they came out of the Tower and I watched them shaking their heads. These men would then be relieved by other fire fighters. I felt sorry for them and saw that they were doing their best. I and others in the crowd thanked them. It was a huge challenge for them and I believe that the lack of access surrounding Grenfell Tower did not help them to do their job. I believe that the area is designed badly.
41. When I was standing outside the Tower on the side closest to the Academy, I saw fire fighters using 2 hoses. I could see that the fire fighters were not at the right level to deal with the fire properly. To me, it seemed as though tackling the fire from the ground was pushing the fire further up the building. I believe that it would have been better if they had worked from above the fire to put out the flames.
42. The ambulance service helped those coming out of the Tower and gave them first aid on the street as well as taking people to hospital. There was panic. It was confusing.
43. At 7.00 am, the Tower was still ablaze. There is now produced and shown to me exhibit 'IH3' which is a video showing this.

Support in the aftermath of the fire

46. After the fire, my sons were offered counselling at school but they did not want it. They do not want to remember what happened that night. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] To this day, my wife cannot believe what happened on 14 June 2017 and she does not want to discuss it with anyone. She does not think that there is any point in talking about it.
47. Me and my family feel that we have lost so much in the fire. I am not looking to blame anyone but would like to find solutions. I believe that access was a huge problem and that those who managed the area should have thought about it. We need to learn from this.



48. To date, I feel traumatised by what I saw on the night of the fire but I try to compare myself to those who lost their lives, their family members or their neighbours. It is unbelievable to think that we will not see certain people ever again. I do not intend to seek help from medical practitioners and, instead, will try to manage things by myself.

49. I try not to return to the area unless absolutely necessary. I do not use the A40 flyover so that I can avoid seeing the Tower. I take another route instead.

Other matters

44. I am willing to assist the Inquiry with any further information that it may need.

Exhibits

45. There is now produced and shown to me referred to as "IH1," [REDACTED] and "IH3", the [REDACTED] pieces of video recorded to my mobile phone. (See above at §30, [REDACTED] §39 and 43).

Statement of Truth

46. I confirm that the content of this witness statement is true.

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

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