

Witness Name: Markrem HARZI

Statement No.: 1

Dated: 14 June 2018

WITNESS STATEMENT OF MAKREM HARZI
FLAT 54, 8TH FLOOR

I, **MAKREM HARZI**, of [REDACTED] N19]
SSN, date of birth [REDACTED] 1984], **WILL SAY** as follows:

1. I am a Core Participant in the Grenfell Tower Inquiry and I make this statement to assist the Inquiry in respect of what it describes as Phase 1.
2. I am male, and my partner is Ms Rawda Said, who was born on [REDACTED] 1987] and we have a son [Y [REDACTED] born on [REDACTED] 2016]. We all lived together in our flat.
3. I confirm that I have not been interviewed by the police in relation to the tower fire.
4. Up until the fire on 14 June 2017 I lived at the Grenfell Tower. I lived with my family at flat 54, which was on the 8th floor of the Tower. We lived in a one-bedroom flat which was owned by my partner's sister, Salma Said, who has two children of her own. Salma and her children were not in the flat on 13 June 2017 or on 14 June 2017.
5. I moved into the Tower in 2014. My wife, Rawda, had lived there since 2006. She had originally moved in with her sister, Salma, who had moved to Grenfell Tower approximately one year earlier.

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The refurbishment

6. When I moved into Grenfell, the refurbishment works that had been carried out by the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea ("RBKC") were coming to an end. I think the works finally finished in about April 2015.
7. I remember that our flat was one of the last to have works done to it and in response to complaints that had been made by other residents we managed to get certain things changed within our own flat. For instance, as I understand it, the proposal from RBKC and the Tenant Management Organisation ("TMO") was that the old boiler in the flat, which was in the kitchen, would be replaced by a brand-new boiler which would be placed in a position by the hallway, very close to our front door. I know that a lot of other residents complained about this location, as no one was very happy about it for various reasons, one of them being that it was felt not safe to have a gas boiler so close to the sole exit from the flats. I think that because of these complaints the TMO and their contractors arranged for the boiler to be put in the same position as the old boiler, which in our case was in the kitchen, of our flat.
8. In addition to replacing the old boiler with a new boiler, the refurbishment works also involved replacing pipe work, for gas and water, within the flat. The big problem we had with the changes was that these new pipes were left exposed; they were not buried in the walls or covered in any way. We were particularly concerned about the hot water pipe, which was hot to the touch. I was concerned about this because my young child, Y [REDACTED], might burn or hurt himself. Despite our complaints about the exposed pipes, the only pipe work that was covered up was in our bathroom where, what I can only describe as a box, was placed over the pipes. Unfortunately, this had the effect of reducing the headroom in our bathroom and made it very difficult for me to have a shower without bending down to avoid the boxed-in pipe work, because I am quite tall.

9. Other than in the bathroom, all the other pipes inside our flat were left exposed. They ran along the floors, up the walls and along our ceilings. It was a mess, in my opinion.
10. The problems with these exposed pipes did not end in our flat. This pipe work also ran outside, into the communal landing, and down the stairs. There were exposed pipes everywhere.
11. I was also unhappy with wires and cables that were left in what seemed to be a box, just by the side of our flat's front door. These were exposed wires and we never knew whether or not they were live cables. My wife and I never touched the cables, for the obvious reason that we feared electrocution, but we were always concerned by the appearance of these bare wires. I never reported this problem to the RBKC. It was my wife who dealt with these things more than me and she may have reported it, but I am not sure.
12. I would say that my impression of the works carried out by Rydon and its sub-contractors was that it was not properly finished, and it was done to poor standard. Things seemed to be just rough and ready, exposed and unfinished, like the pipe work. In my view, RBKC had made more efforts to beautify the exterior of the building rather than to concentrate on the quality of the finish and materials used in all aspects of the refurbishment.
13. The refurbishment was a very large project, three new floors were added in what had previously been public open spaces. This meant that my flat went from being described as on floor 5 to being on a new floor 8.
14. There were other changes during the refurbishment that I was not happy about. For example, the old manned concierge office, which had always had someone on duty, was replaced by a very modern-looking reception area but unfortunately it was no longer staffed. This, I think, did cause problems because after the refurbishment we started to have problems with unwanted

people loitering inside the building. Also, the new main entrance had electrically-operated doors fitted, which did not work properly. The glass was broken on occasions and it would take about a week for it to be fixed. The front door would not close properly and so the catch would not connect. This meant that someone could just push the door open even if they did not have a key.

15. I should also say that in addition to the works done to our boiler and the exposed pipe work in our flat, I also had new windows fitted by Rydon. My wife and I were not very happy about the way the new windows were fitted. The new windows had a PVC surrounds, but after they were fitted we always had a draught blowing into our bedroom. They were not sealed properly, it seems, as air was getting around the frame. My wife and I complained about this and in response some workmen came to our flat and put some kind of silicon sealant around our window frame, where it met the wall. Unfortunately, this never eliminated the draught, but nothing further was done for us by the TMO or Rydon.
16. We had no opportunity to properly influence the works and we were not consulted about the refurbishment. My family and I were not given any information about the refurbishment's potential effect on fire safety in Grenfell Tower. We had very little to say in how the work was done, unless we complained about the works. When we complained about the exposed pipe work in our flat and the public areas of the building, my wife and I were told that nothing could be done because that was what had been decided by the TMO and it could not be changed to suit our wishes. I really do not think that the residents' own wishes were taken into account at all when the refurbishment was planned.
17. In terms of information about fire safety within Grenfell Tower before the fire on 14 June 2017, as far as I can remember there was no information given to me or my family, at all, about what to do in the event of a fire either in our flat or in another part of the building. I recall no fire drills, and never heard any

fire alarm testing. Although we did have a smoke alarm fitted in the hallway of our flat, I do not know if there were smoke alarms anywhere in the common areas of the building. I think there could have been one on our landing, but I am not one hundred percent certain. I did not ever hear it go off.

18. We did have an annual safety check, which was carried out by the TMO, which was the management company at Grenfell Tower. I know this because they actually carried one out in very early 2017 and we were advised by them that we would have to change our cooker, as it was no longer compliant with the regulations. As a result, we had to buy a new cooker for our flat in order to satisfy the TMO. We bought the cooker in about February 2017, so only a few months before the fire in June 2017. I do not recollect them checking or inspecting our fridge.
19. I remember that as part of the refurbishment, the TMO changed our door. We used to have an old wooden door, but that was changed to a door which we were told was fire resistant. It had a PVC coating. I do not remember how many hinges the door had or if there were any gaps around the door. Our front door had a letterbox which closed fully on its own.
20. The doors for the living room, kitchen and bedroom did not close fully due to the doors being too old.
21. There was an extractor fan in both the bathroom and the kitchen and I believe they were both working.
22. We could not hear noises from our neighbours and we could not smell cooking from other flats.
23. The lifts would break down about once every two or three weeks but normally one would still be working. It would take about two or three days to fix them.
24. I do not remember having problems with the electricity in our flat.

25. As we were on the 8th floor, our main means of access to the ground floor was via the lifts. There were two lifts in Grenfell Tower. They were not changed during the refurbishment. Only the plastic flooring in the lifts was refurbished. Unfortunately, the lifts were not very good and often broke down. Sometimes we would find out that it would be three to four days before the lift was repaired. That meant that quite often we had to use the stairs to gain access to the ground floor and quite often in the morning the lifts would be so busy that it was quicker for me to use the stairs.
26. The stairs at Grenfell were actually one of the parts of the building that were not touched at all during the refurbishment. They looked very old to me. They were very dirty, and stained, and they also smelled quite bad. There was always a smell of stale tobacco and also urine in the stairwells. They were not very pleasant to use at all.
27. The stairwell was also quite narrow. There was barely room for a two people to pass abreast of each other. Also, there was only one stairwell in Grenfell Tower.

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28. [REDACTED] My wife and I had put our son to bed and we went to bed ourselves at between 11:30 pm and midnight on the night of 13 to 14 June 2017, [REDACTED] We had no visitors at our flat that evening and therefore only I, my wife and our son were in the flat when the fire started in the early hours of the morning.
29. I do not know exactly what time it was, but sometime after midnight we were all awoken by someone banging loudly on the front door of the flat. My wife got up and went to see who was banging on the door. It was our neighbour from Flat 51, Khalid. He said that there was a fire in the building and that we

had to get out. I confirm that it was just Khalid at our door and he had not spoken to any fireman as far as I am aware. There were no firemen at this stage that we could see. The firemen were downstairs and not on our floor. I know that there were firemen below as we passed them next to the boxing gym as we fled the building later. I remember that behind him we could already see smoke in our communal landing, it was not thick smoke but it was clearly visible. At the time of leaving the flat there was smoke, but it was not very thick. The smoke was not black but more a grey/white colour and you could see through it. I realised straightaway that something was seriously wrong. My wife and I decided to leave our flat immediately, with our child.

30. The three of us rushed out of our flat in our nightclothes. We had two smoke alarms in our flat, one in the kitchen and one in the hallway. Neither of these went off. I know that they were both working as they would go off when we were cooking. This had happened recently within the last month. No smoke alarms were going off outside our flat as there were none. I did not even stop to pick up my mobile phone, nor did my wife, we just got out with our son straightway. I did stop briefly to put on my shoes, however my wife only had flip flops on as we started down the stairs.
31. I recall that as we were leaving our flat our neighbour, Khalid, was knocking on our other neighbours' doors, when an elderly couple who lived in flat 56 opened the door in response to his knocking. I recall at that point I could now see quite thick smoke come out of the flat, as the front door opened. The smoke coming out of Flat 56 came out when they opened their door. The smoke that came out was black and much darker than the smoke that was on the landing. I cannot remember what the smoke smelt like as everything was moving so quickly. There was lots of smoke coming out of their flat, but I could not see inside their flat properly as their flat was in the corner. All I could see was the smoke leaving through the front door. I could not see that they were coughing. Their flat was on the same side of the building where the fire had started in the Tower (the side of Grenfell Tower containing flat 16). I could clearly see that by this stage, the point at which my family and I had entered the landing to escape (a time I do not know), I could see the smoke

coming from inside flat 56. This lent even more urgency to my decision for my family to leave the building soon as possible.

32. At the time I entered the stairwell -we had to open the door leading into it - the stairs were quite busy. It certainly was not possible to run down the stairwell and it was not possible to walk at a hasty pace down the stairs. This was because there were quite a number of people, I cannot recall how many, in front of and behind me and my family on the stairs. I absolutely cannot remember how many people. It was like a dream.
33. It felt like being in a dream going down those stairs. In the stairwell I do not remember there being any smoke or if there was then it was very limited. I could see down the stairs as the smoke (if there was any) was not thick. As I have said I cannot remember if there was no smoke or if it was just very thin. I do not remember if there was any smell of smoke on the stairwell. There were lights on in the stairwell, but I do not know if they were the emergency lights or the ordinary lights. I could not hear any fire alarms either above or below where we were, while we were going down the stairwell. However, when I reached around the boxing gym on the first floor, or shortly after, I could hear alarms, but I do not know where the sound was coming from or what the alarms actually were. However, it must have been close as it sounded quite loud. As mentioned above when we were leaving our floor via the stairwell, there were no firemen that we could see.
34. There were people in the stairwell who had clearly just woken up. They were in a state of semi-undress and clearly did not have on proper outdoor clothes. I remember seeing people topless and people just in their underwear, all going down the stairs. They had obviously left their flats in haste and urgency, just like me and my family.
35. We could only go down in single file down the stairwell, as very soon we met fire fighters coming up the stairs. We first met the firefighters either on the floor with the boxing gym or shortly after that. I think we passed about three or four firemen at this point. I also recall seeing the fire fighters' hoses being

run up the stairwell. The fire fighters and their hoses restricted the width of the stairwell which could be used by the residents leaving the building. I do not know how long it took for my family to get down the stairs, but it seemed to be no more than five or ten minutes. I really am not sure, though.

36. I subsequently learned from the police that the CCTV camera which was located in our ground floor of the Tower area captured me leaving the building at 1:24 am. From this information, assuming that it took my family five to ten minutes to get down the stairwell from the 8th floor, I would have thus seen the smoke coming out of the front door of flat 56, when it was opened by the occupants, at between approximately 1:14 am and 1:19 am.
37. Although we passed firemen going up the stairs, none of them spoke to us or gave us instructions until we got down to the ground floor. There, I remember the fire fighter just telling us to move away.
38. Outside, we just naturally congregated by one corner of the building, near where there is a gym. However, my family and the other people could not stay there very long because we could see the fire was really taking hold of the Tower and parts of the cladding were starting to burn away and rain down. We were moved back from the Tower by the police.
39. I would say that my perception of the initial scene of the fire was that there were more police than fire fighters around the outside of the Tower, and it was the police who were asking us to move back. We were being constantly asked to move further back through the rest of the night, as we watched the Tower burn. I do remember that the cordon got further and further away from the building as the night progressed.
40. I really did not see many fire fighters, initially, when I exited the building. There were only two fire engines outside the main exit, when I left at around 1:24 am.

41. When we first got outside, I could immediately see the fire seemed to be strongly raging on the fourth floor but within minutes, literally just minutes, it started to spread up the whole side of the building on the same side as flat 16.
42. At this time, I could only see one fireman outside with a fire hose spraying water on the outside of the building, and that stream of water only seemed to be reaching as far as the fourth floor.
43. It seemed to me there were not enough firemen on the scene, at the early point of the fire's spread, to be able to stop the fire from spreading up the outside of the building, which it did very rapidly. The fire then started to move across and around the building as well.
44. Within only a few minutes the whole building, on the side I was looking at, which is the same side as flat 16, seemed to be alight. It was frightening how quickly the flames travelled on the outside of the building.
45. Initially, my family and I stayed together as a family group. However, at about 4:00 am one of our friends from the flats took my wife and my son to the home of another person. I stayed outside the Tower, just watching the building burn. I stayed until around 6:00 am. I then went to the same house as my wife. While I was standing outside, I could hear shouting from the people trapped in their flats high up in the Tower but after a while, although I cannot say how long, the shouting stopped and then all I could hear was what sounded to me like explosions. I presume this sound came from gas appliances and electrical appliances starting to catch fire within flats, and blowing-up.

Aftermath

46. In the hours after the fire, I had thought that everyone had gotten out safely. I did not know the full extent of the disaster and that so many people had lost their lives or were missing. My family stayed for a while at a friend's house and then at about 7:00 am my wife's brother came and took us to his house in [REDACTED] We stayed there overnight and went back to the Grenfell area on 15

June 2017. I remember that as we approached the building again, I could see that it was still smoking and smouldering quite badly.

47. As we got closer to the Tower, I remember someone, although I do not remember who, told us that we should go to the Rugby Portobello Trust, as many other survivors were gathering there. I remember being moved by the generosity of the local community in the hours and days which followed the fire. At the Portobello Rugby Trust there was an informal information exchange between other survivors and that is how we got most of our information in the first few days. We were able to get food, water, clothing, bedding, all of which was provided by the local community.
48. I do not recall seeing anyone from the RBKC or the TMO in the days following the fire; in fact it may have been a week or so until we had any contact with anyone from either the RBKC or the TMO. All the help, all the information that we got in the first few days came from the local community, from volunteers and from our neighbours. I cannot praise their efforts highly enough. They were all wonderful.
49. We also received help at the Westway Centre, and again we were able to get clothing, bedding, food, and provisions from there.
50. I remember that someone, I think the person had come from Harrow Council, arranged a place for my family to stay at the Hilton Hotel on Edgware Road. I also remember seeing council staff from Westminster Council, but I did not interact from anyone from the RBKC or from the TMO.
51. My family and I went to the Hilton Hotel in Edgware Road on the second night after the fire and we stayed there until sometime in September 2017. I would say that we did not really like staying in the hotel, as a family, because we felt quite isolated. I think that we were the only family from Grenfell Tower that ended up in the Hilton Hotel on Edgware Road. Most other survivors were housed in two hotels much nearer to Grenfell Tower than we were, so we did feel quite remote during our time there. We only had one

room and there were three adults, myself, my wife Rawda, and her sister, Salma, and we all had three children. This included Salma's two children and our own son, Y[REDACTED].

52. We eventually solved the accommodation problem because friends and relatives gave a place for some of the children to stay at their homes, so it meant that the room at the hotel was not overcrowded. However, at no stage did anyone from the RBKC come to visit us to make sure that the accommodation that we had been provided with was suitable for us. It really was not sufficient for a family group.
53. We did ask RBKC to be moved from the hotel, but that request was refused. We also requested a microwave to allow us to cook simple meals, because we wanted our son to have freshly prepared food and not just hotel food. Although RBKC said that a microwave would be provided, they did not provide it and in the end, we got a microwave from the hotel staff.
54. We also had problems with laundry. We were given a single laundry voucher by RBKC but were told that we had to have the laundry done back near the Tower at a laundry in Ladbroke Grove. It was obviously very difficult for my wife to get from the hotel in Edgware Road to Ladbroke Grove, with a full load of laundry. She only did this journey once, and after that we just washed our clothes at a laundry near at our hotel, at our own expense. This highlights how things were not properly thought-out and seemed unfair on residents.
55. I would not say that the staff at RBKC came across as being particularly sympathetic to our predicament. I remember that as we did not like staying so far from everyone else from the Tower, we did ask the RBKC to move us from the Hilton Hotel. In response, I recall that my wife and I received a telephone call from someone connected with RBKC, at about 8:00 pm one evening. We were told that we had to leave our hotel that evening and go to a new hotel, which was in Waterloo. As this was even further away than where we were already, and we already felt quite isolated anyway, my wife and I were very reluctant to make this move. We were particularly reluctant to move, given

that it was so late in the evening and we were just about to put our son to bed. It seemed to be incredibly unthinking and uncaring. In the end we stayed at the Hilton Hotel until we moved to the house that we are now living in, which is at [REDACTED]. We have been at this location since September 2017.

56. Although our current accommodation is fine, it is quite a way from the Kensington area where we have our friends and our ex-neighbours from Grenfell Tower. I and my family still feel very isolated out here. This was the first property that we were told about by RBKC and it was very much presented to us as if we had no choice i.e. we had to go there whether we liked it or not. I recall statements in the media from government ministers that residents of Grenfell Tower would be allowed a choice over accommodation, and that no one would be forced to move to accommodation they did not like. However, that was not my impression about how accommodation was offered to survivors. I did feel that we had no choice to remain in borough, and it seemed that our only option was to accept new accommodation in North Islington.
57. However, only in the last few weeks have we been allowed to move to permanent accommodation at a new address back in the Kensington area.
58. I have to say that the fire has affected me very badly. I have felt very depressed and low since the night of 14 June 2017, but my way of dealing with it is to try to forget the incident as much as possible and not think about the terrible events of that night. So many people died, including friends of mine. A whole family, the Hashim family, whom we had seen only the weekend before the fire, all died in their flat on the 22nd floor. We have been left devastated by the loss of so many neighbours and friends.
59. My son has been badly affected by what happened. He seems to be very socially withdrawn and does not really engage with people. It is becoming a concern to me and my wife.


60. I would also say that I have really lost my trust in the authorities in this country. I feel that we were badly let down by RBKC in the days and weeks following the fire, as there was really no information and no real help from them. It was chaotic and disorganised. I felt very much isolated being accommodated in north London, away from the main source of information and help in Kensington. We were also cut off from our neighbours and friends in the area. Although we have been offered counselling, we were told that we would have to travel back to Kensington to have it. They would not organise for the counsellors to travel nearer to us. I honestly felt that some decisions seemed cruel and that they left my family feeling neglected.
61. Although I gave my and my wife's names to the police on the night of the fire, we were not contacted by them until February 2018 to take a statement for the criminal investigation. Unfortunately, we have not been able to arrange a time and a date for them to take a statement from us. At the present time, therefore, I have not made any statement to the police.
62. I have not given any statements to the press or TV. In fact, as a family we have been quite appalled by the coverage of the Grenfell fire in the media and in particular in the popular press. There does seem to be a slant against Grenfell survivors. Some sections of the press seem to be only interested in publishing negative stories about illegal immigrants being in the Tower on the night of the fire, or that the flats were unlawfully sub-let. I saw stories alleging that there were drugs found in flats. It has been negative publicity, and they have tried to present us in the most negative way possible, which is why we have been reluctant to speak to the press ourselves.
63. I have also been shocked at the level of abuse that I have seen of residents online. I have in particular seen horrible comments on Facebook, and also on some UK news media webpages. I can think in particular on the commentary on the Sky News website. These websites allow people to post comments on news stories and I have seen an unbelievable amount of quite racist abuse being directed at survivors in response to the stories put on Sky News about Grenfell Tower. It really has been quite shocking and deeply distressing to me

and my family. Although there are some favourable comments, I think that the unfavourable comments and the abusive racist comments far outnumber the supportive comments on these websites. The media has a duty to consider its obligations, I believe, towards survivors when commentary is not really “news” and especially if it causes distress and racist insult being hurled at families and survivors.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed: _____


Markrem HARZI