

Witness Statement of: Marcia Levi

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Exhibits: 0

Date of statement: 15.05.2018

## IN THE GRENFELL TOWER PUBLIC INQUIRY

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### WITNESS STATEMENT OF MARCIA LEVI

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I, MARCIA LEVI, will say as follows:

1. This statement is my account of events that took place on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017. This statement is for the purposes of Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower 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. My date of birth is [REDACTED]
3. I work at the [REDACTED] secondary school as the Lead Teaching Assistant for Speech, Language and Communication needs. I have worked in this role for three years and have been at [REDACTED] since 2012. From 2003 to 2012, I worked at Avondale Park Primary School. Before this, I worked at the Ilys Booker crèche on the Lancaster West Estate from 2001 to 2003.
4. I have lived in Lancaster West Estate for 28 years. When I first moved in, I lived at 28 Upper Grenfell Walk (now referred to as 208 Grenfell Walk). Renovations then took place and I moved to Testerton Walk in 1994 and I have lived there ever since.

5. My flat is on the upper floor of Testerton Walk. It is at the end, closest to the Tower, and the view from our balcony outside our front room looks out onto Grenfell Tower. The Tower is very close to our flat.
6. I lived in that flat with my son Aaron (now aged 34 and living in Spain), my daughter Naomi (now aged 29), my son Joshua (now aged 26), my daughter Rhianna (now aged 18) and my grandson [REDACTED] (now aged 9).
7. Since the Grenfell Tower Fire, we have been living in temporary accommodation near Earl's Court.
8. When we first moved to the Estate, I had moved over from the USA. My mother had moved to the USA so I also moved over there in 1984, but came back in 1988. When we first came back, we were placed in temporary accommodation and then got offered our place in Grenfell Walk.
9. At the time I had my son, Aaron and my daughter, Naomi. I worked as a volunteer for the Lancaster West Estate Management Board (EMB). This was when Mr Kingsford was Director of Kensington and Chelsea council and Mr Page was Manager for the Lancaster West EMB. My role was to represent residents on the Area Review Board (ARB) where we managed budgets for major repair works on the estate. I was also the treasurer for Lancaster West Residents Association (LWRA) which was chaired by Mrs Daniels. Other members of the LWRB included Mrs Richer and Mrs Caldwell. I was not in these positions at the time of the fire.

#### Renovations

10. In around 2016 there were renovations to the estate. I had seen many fires in the Tower before the 14 June, but these fire were before it was renovated and they were before they built the Aldridge Academy.
11. I had never seen work done so quickly as when they were putting the cladding on the building. I would go to work in the morning and by the time I got back I saw that they had already done several floors. I did think at the time that they are finished the work



too quickly but I never thought it was unsafe – the school made it look nice, I thought it looked nice. I just thought ‘when are they going to do our side up?’

12. I was very involved at the beginning when I first moved to the estate as a member of the management board, but to be honest I didn’t even know that the Residents Association (RA) existed until the fire happened. Due to working long hours every day, I think I was out of sync and unaware of the problems that people were discussing at the meetings.
13. I did not know who the members of the RA were. I don’t know if I would have gone to the meetings if I had known it existed. I did not know that the members had warned about certain things happening.
14. I know that whilst they were building Aldridge Academy, there were a lot of issues, for example many mornings we wouldn’t have any hot water or heating. My next door neighbour and I would text each other about it. I also definitely thought that the Tower had been covered too quickly during the refurbishments. However, I was not aware about concerns for safety. Had I known about these serious issues, undoubtedly I would have got involved.
15. I did hear that there were plans to build a new school but felt that no matter how we felt it was going to be built nevertheless. I did want the place to look nice and new, to feel proud of it when I brought my family and friends here, but I had not thought about the consequences of regeneration.
16. There is a lot that I would want to say about the history of the estate and wider background issues but for now will limit my comments to what happened on the night of the fire and the impact that this has had on me. I understand that the Inquiry will be dealing with the aftermath and wider issues at a later stage as part of Phase 2 and I want to make a further statement as part of Phase 2.

### Community

17. I think the community is full of lovely people. It was a nice place to live. We looked out for each other and it felt safe. If you went away for three weeks, you knew your

home would be safe. People would collect your parcels for you. It was a beautiful place to bring up my children.

18. My children were always busy when they were growing up, with ballet, swimming, and gymnastics. At the local school, all the mums knew each other but we were not in and out of each other's houses. It was a beautiful place, but it has died now. I don't know if it can ever go back to what it was.

#### 14 June

19. On the day of 13<sup>th</sup> June, I had not been at work because I had had a migraine. I went to bed that evening at about 11pm.

20. I was woken up by my son Joshua who came into my room and said "Grenfell Tower is on fire". I jumped out of bed and went to my front room. My front room looks out on the Tower. I would say the Tower is about 120 metres from the window of my front room. I could see a long line of fire on the Tower which was on the right hand side of the Tower as I was looking at it from my patio doors. I would say that the fire started from about where our flat was, which is on the upper level of Testerton Walk, so from about the fifth floor.

21. I was shaking like a leaf; I thought that it was a terrorist attack as there had been some recent terrorist attacks in London at the time. Because of this, I thought that we might be in danger. The fire wasn't raging outwards but it looked as though it was going up the building. I am not sure if it was going right to the top of the building at this point. I don't recall seeing people. I could hear the crackling of the fire. It looked as though there was a long line of fire going up on the inside of the building.

22. I remember checking the time on my phone and it was about 1.20am.

23. I did open the patio doors ajar slightly, which face the Tower, and then I quickly closed them. Naomi ran upstairs and said 'we have to get out of here'. We were worried for our safety; the fire seemed to be coming our way. I ran to my bedroom and grabbed a "grab bag" that I keep for emergencies which contains all our

passports. I also grabbed my work bag and quickly put on some clothes. Rhianna was screaming and crying.

24. All of the family ran out of the flat into the corridor within Testerton Walk. This would have been about 1.30am. When we got outside of our flat, into the corridor, we saw a policeman knocking on people's doors and telling them to leave. My daughter Rhianna knocked on our neighbour Grace's door to alert her to the fire but there was no reply.
25. Our normal entry to Testerton Walk is just by the Tower. We were too frightened to go towards the Tower so we went back to the other exit which goes on the green between Testerton Walk and Brandon Walk. I have a memory lapse from this point, for which I am currently receiving counselling to include addressing our movements and actions between the Walkway. I therefore don't remember how we travelled there, but we went to stand outside Latimer Road station, near Hurstway Walk.
26. I don't recall why we knew to go in this direction. I don't recall any police officers telling us to go there. They didn't say where we should go specifically, they just said that we needed to evacuate.
27. There were loads of people around from the Walks. It is difficult for me to measure the number of people I could see from the Walks as people were strewn along in both directions along Bramley Road. I do recall seeing some people I knew from Brandon Walk dressed in night gowns and faces of people that I knew from the estate. The police just seemed shocked – they weren't giving people directions. Everyone was just looking up at the Tower. The fire fighters were all looking up.
28. I don't remember receiving directions from anyone, apart from when we were standing by Latimer Road station and we heard a voice – I don't know who they were - telling us to move out of the way. We all just replied 'where are we supposed to go?' It was chaos.
29. From the moment I woke up and saw the fire, I was worried about the safety of the people in the building. I knew that there was definitely people that I knew who were inside the building.

30. There were tonnes of reporters around who had turned up from about 2am. Reports on the news were coming in on everyone's phones in dribs and drabs from about 2am.
31. It was when we were standing here looking up at the Tower that I realised that this was a very serious incident. There was a long line of fire moving up the Tower at a rapid pace and it just didn't seem to be going out. I thought 'oh my gosh, why isn't it going out?' I thought that people weren't going to be able to get out the Tower.
32. I was standing near to someone who lived in the Tower. I recognised him but I didn't know his name. He was talking on his mobile to two people that I knew. They were Moses (this is what he was referred to as but his full name was Raymond Bernard) and Steve Power.
33. I knew Moses from around the estate. I had not seen him for a while until about a month before the fire when I saw him and we had a chat. My son Aaron described Moses as the "father" to the young people on the estate. He was an amazingly calm man.
34. Steve was a very sociable person. I knew him and I knew his children and his grandchildren also. Steve and his friends would congregate at the bottom of the ramp that leads to Grenfell Walk near the Tower, near the main entry and exit way from Testerton Walk. He would hang out there drinking and I would see him often.
35. From where I was standing, I could see people inside the Tower. You could see people inside waving towels and torchlights and screaming for help in the windows. It was the worst screams I've ever heard in my life. One minute you would see someone standing in a window, and then the next moment the fire would have wrapped around the window and you couldn't see them anymore.
36. At some points we saw blue flames, which we thought were gas explosions.
37. There were pieces of material falling from the Tower throughout the night. It was light stuff, like paper-ish, all different sizes blowing around. At one point, I remember a piece of material flew onto me.

38. Although I was focusing on looking at the people inside the Tower who were waving white towels and, I think, their mobile phones screaming 'help help', I did see someone falling out of the Tower on two occasions. I am a bit cagey about the exact time and I am not able to say how far apart the two incidents were, but I would say that I saw the two people falling between 2am to 3am. I just remember seeing people in the window and then suddenly saw them coming out of the building. I could not see the ground of where the people fell from where we were standing.

39. I remember a guy shouting out 'I told them this was going to happen. I lit a flame and showed them how quick it would burn'.

40. I still thought it was terrorism at that point – I still don't understand what caused a fire like that. I had seen so many fires in the Tower, but they would always be isolated to that particular flat. All the fires I had seen prior to this one were from before the Tower was renovated in 2016. I remember one fire in particular that took place approximately a quarter of the way up the Tower on the side that one would use to enter Grenfell Crèche. After the fire took place, I remember seeing the burnt out room through the window and a black line under the window. That fire was isolated and did not affect the flats above it or below in any way. This fire was different.

41. From where we were standing, I saw approximately seven ambulances near the ramp that leads to the Aldridge Academy from the Tower, which had been blocked off. Janice, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] was helping the ambulance crew with injured people from the Tower. I could see injured people being ushered into the ambulances. I heard someone say 'oh my god, he is dead' about someone they were helping and I saw one specific person who people said was dead. I think this person was a man but I cannot be sure. I wanted to help too but my feet were fixed. I just couldn't move. I could not go anywhere nearby.

42. The fire seemed as though it was following a path. I still thought that it was terrorism. It was circling around the Tower. It climbed up very quickly and raged on both sides.

43. We were worried about the gas works on Bramley Road that went on for ages. For several weeks before the fire, Bramley Road up to Latimer Road Station was partially

blocked. A temporary bus stop stand was placed and moved further away on different days. About two weeks before the fire I had to walk to work because this road was completely closed to buses and diversions were put in place for motorists.

44. There had been a strong smell of gas, which we had been complaining about. I was worried about the constant smell of gas on the corner of Whitechurch Road, which is where the gas works were intermittently carried out. I worried that one day there would be a gas explosion on the estate because of the strong gas leak that was apparent for so long. I knew how serious a gas leak could be because there was a gas explosion on the high road near to where I lived during my teenage ages in Brentford, Middlesex where someone lost their life.
45. I don't recall seeing any fire engines from where we were standing, although I could hear them. I did see two fire fighters standing on Bramley Road opposite Latimer Road Station, though. I had a conversation with one: he was standing there, looking up. He said to me that he had never seen anything like it in his life. He was shaking his head. He told me that hundreds of people had died, which is a lot more than what they are saying now. This was at about 5am or 6am.
46. At about 7am or 8am, I snuck back into our flat to get my medication [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] I ran in and got my tablets. The fire was still burning. There was loads of water in the Walkway. I saw a body bag in the corridor of the Walkway. I was shocked when I saw that – someone said that that it was a jumper. The Walkway level and the upper Walkway level leading up to my flat was flooded with water.
47. We were standing outside the Latimer Road station for hours until daylight. We were walking back and forth – pacing – throughout the night and morning, between Latimer Road station and Hurstway Walk.
48. The fire was still raging until about 11am. At this time, you could see that the fire was still burning inside the windows of the Tower, but mostly you could see the masses of black and grey smoke that plumed out. Someone – I don't know who – told us to go to the Harrow Club. The Harrow Club had opened its doors. The Harrow Club usually provides after school activities and sports for children. They were serving sandwiches

and drinks. By this time, we were completely parched. We had had no water whilst we were standing there watching – I was just standing there in shock.

### Aftermath

49. I do not recall receiving any guidance from the police at all. At about midday, we were then told we were going to be evacuated from the Harrow Club to the Rugby Portobello Club. We were told there were fears that the Tower would collapse. People were taken in vans – I think that belonged to the Harrow Club – to the Rugby Club, however me and my family walked. We couldn't get in for ages, someone was taking a register. We were standing outside. Again once we got inside the Rugby Club there were sandwiches and drinks for us.
50. On the morning of the fire, we had been outside all night until daylight. We just stood outside the Rugby Club for ages, we didn't know what to do. We went to sit outside Avondale Park Primary School which was near to the Rugby Club. The school wasn't open properly, I don't think, it was just there supporting people. I started speaking to the teachers there, who were asking 'has anyone heard from Nadia?'
51. Nadia Choucair was my friend. I used to work at Avondale Park Primary School with Nadia. I knew she lived in the Tower but I didn't know what floor. At that stage living in the Tower didn't mean that you had lost your life because you could have got out or been in hospital.
52. At about 4pm, my family and I went to Avondale Park. We fell asleep on a bench. We went to St Clement's Church in the evening. Lots of people were there. They were giving people clothing, bras, underwear.
53. There were officials sitting at tables inside the Church who people were lining up to see. We asked 'are you from the Council?' and they said 'no'. We asked them what we should do and they said 'go and stay with a friend or family member'. I asked how we should get there and they did not have any answers. I asked if they could provide a taxi – and they said yes, so we went to my sister's in Clapham Common in a taxi. We stayed at my sister's every night until the Sunday after the fire.



54. In between staying at my sister's, we would go back to the area to find out what was going on. We found out about the Westway Centre, which we went to on Friday. I remember the people there gave us wristbands and registered our address. We did speak to a few nice people at the Westway. Some people, who were volunteers working as representatives for RBKC and the TMO, took our mobile numbers because they were trying to find us a hotel. I got a call from them at midnight on the Friday night but we were not prepared to leave my sister's at that time of night.
55. We met the Queen on the first day we went to Westway, on the Friday 16 June. The Queen spoke to my daughter Rhianna. My daughter told the Queen that we had been evacuated. There was a video of Rhianna speaking to the Queen that went viral on the internet.
56. There was no one at the Westway Centre from the Council or from the TMO. Although tables were labelled as "RBKC" and "TMO", the people sitting and working there stated they were not from either and had come down from Bromley Council.
57. At the Westway, we were advised to go and see the NHS doctors due to the trauma and other issues that had arisen, such as the occurrence of a painful lump on my breast. We had not washed properly. We were messed up.
58. On Monday 19 June, I said to Naomi, 'this is too much, we have got to sort something out'. We went to the Westway and they had said we could go to the Cumberland Hotel but that we couldn't go home.
59. We went to the Cumberland Hotel and stayed there until August. We wanted to move from the Cumberland Hotel because it was quite a distance away from where we had lives and, with my grandson still at school, we were trekking him back and forth each day. The Cumberland Hotel was also further away from my daughter's, my son's and my places of work. The Cumberland Hotel also felt quite touristy and my family and I felt that we could not relate to that hotel. I also didn't feel comfortable having my daughters in the area as I think it was quite "red light" and it was not very nice for young girls to be around the area of the hotel.



60. In August I asked if we could move to the [REDACTED] Hotel and they agreed. I spoke to my key-worker and asked for accommodation and we finally moved to the one we are in now near Earl's Court on 30 September. This accommodation is only temporary, however, and we don't know how long we will be here for.

#### People from the Tower

61. Nadia Choucair used to work at Avondale Park Primary School when I worked there from 2003 to 2012. We worked together for about 5 years from 2007. I also knew Nadia's daughter who was in reception class at the same school we worked at together.

62. I had seen Nadia about a week before the fire. I had collected my grandson from school. He was taught by Nadia. It was the first time we had seen each other in a little while and we had had a little conversation. We talked about the fact that she had just been on maternity leave and that I was surprised she had had another one!

63. I would see Nadia every now and then when we were both out shopping on a Saturday. Although I learnt from the teachers at Avondale Park Primary School that Nadia was missing on the day of the fire, it became increasingly evident to me soon after the fire that she may have died because pictures of her face and of her whole family started to appear on the missing people posters around the area and the estate. I went to Nadia's funeral. It was very distressing for me.

64. I had a proper connection with Nadia. She was one of the most beautiful people you could come across. She was angelic; she would always be there to help you. She was always smiling. Her daughters were the same as her. Her eldest was in Year 7 at school and she had another daughter who was in Year 3. I think her tiny little one was in nursery.

65. I knew a lot of people in the Tower. For example, I went to counselling and there was a lady there who I recognised from the estate who just came and gave me a hug. I know she lived in the Tower, but I don't think I even know her name; but I knew her well enough from seeing her around. That's what it was like with people on the Estate.

66. Obviously I knew Steve and Moses who I heard a person speaking to inside the Tower on the night of the fire. I knew that both Steve and Moses lived on upper floors.
67. Steve would always sit in the park by the school. He used to sit out there and I'd see him there and also around the Estate all the time walking his dog.
68. Moses was a very kind man. He was getting older so I didn't see him around as much as I used to but I did happen to see him about a month before the fire. When my children were young, they thought of him as an elder.
69. About a week before the fire, I saw Nur Huda El-Wahabi next to the bus stop on Bramley Road. Nur Huda always waited at that bus stop with her friends and sometimes her mother. I knew Nur Huda from seeing her at the Latimer Road bus stop during the week days on my work mornings. She would wait at the bus stop with her friends. Nur Huda would always acknowledge me with a smile when she saw me and sometimes say 'morning'. I remember seeing her kissing her mother goodbye on some mornings. When I saw her about a week before the fire, she had seen me sitting at the main bus stop. At this time she was with her friends at a temporary bus stop further along. She actually walked back to me from where she was to tell me that the bus stop was closed. I remember thinking what a lovely young girl as she cared to walk back to remind me that the stop was out of service.
70. On the day of the fire, when we outside Avondale Park Primary School, my daughter Rhianna's friend walked by. She was crying and told Rhianna that Yasin El-Wahabi, Nur Huda's brother, had not made it out of the Tower and had died. Rhianna began crying uncontrollably and hyper-ventilating. Later that evening whilst at my sister's, Rhianna told me that she had read on Facebook that Yasin was in hospital, but the other messages read 'RIP Yasin'. We were confused as to which was true. Then, later, in the early hours of the morning on the 15<sup>th</sup> June, I heard Rhianna crying loudly and hyper-ventilating and saying that Yasin was dead. There were rumours that he went back into the Tower to get his family and did not make it back out but we are not sure what it true. Rhianna knew Yasin very well and he was very popular.

71. A few days later it was confirmed that the whole El-Wahabi family had died in the fire. The whole family were well liked by everyone who knew them.

72. As the photographs of the missing people started appearing on the walls around the estate, I recognised a lot of people. It's a big estate and I didn't even know that a lot of people I recognised lived in the Tower. Human beings fail sometimes when they are not able to put a name to a face, but these people were part of my life.

### Impact

73. For about two to four days after the fire I was vomiting and was nauseous. I had a headache for two weeks and I was not sleeping. We were all forgetting to eat. Because we were in a hotel and couldn't cook we were buying unhealthy options.

74. I also noticed a massive thing appeared on my breast, like a hard lump about two inches wide, appear on my breast two days after the fire. I thought it was cancer at first. I remembered that on the night I had been looking up and was not dressed properly, and something had flown down and landed on me. I remember brushing it off. By the Friday, I had excruciating pain on my breast. I saw a doctor and was told that it was a cyst. It burst, but wouldn't heal so I saw a breast specialist. I was given antibiotics, but it wouldn't go down. It finally went away in August. I told the doctor that something had fallen on me, but she told me that it was related to stress and trauma, and that our bodies react in different ways. However, it has reappeared three times since the fire. The doctor has confirmed that it is a Sebaceous Cyst.

75. I did have a cough afterwards. There was a lot of smoke around but I think shock took over and it was not until afterwards that I realised how much smoke there was. The smoke seemed to be pumping upwards and then spreading out. I didn't think about it at the time because I felt I was far enough anyway.

76. My next door neighbour from Testerton Walk was suddenly diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer in December 2017 and sadly passed away in January 2018. I keep on thinking about him and remember seeing him on the morning of the fire. He was outside Lancaster West Estate rested against a wall. He looked so exhausted. I knew he worked night shifts so he would have come back and not been able to get home

because of the fire. I often wonder if toxins from the fire contributed to his sudden illness and death.

77. I was not able to go back to work until September.

78. I don't wish to go into detail in this statement about the impact that the fire had on my family members, other than to say everyone has been badly affected and this has impacted on their physical and mental health.

79. As a single parent, the fire has really affected me. The way I am, I want to make everything safe for my family. I have had a hard time dealing with what has happened. I feel very unsettled. For the last 28 years, we were happy – we felt safe and had security. Now I feel very anxious. I have counselling now for PTSD, which I have been diagnosed with. I started receiving the counselling in July, but have been having regular weekly sessions since September.

80. I write about the terrible things that I saw.

81. One very sad thing that happened is what we have had to get rid of our dog Frankie as a result of the fire. We kept Frankie with us when we were evacuated and for the whole night. He was noticeably really parched, his tongue was hanging out. We finally found some water for him. Rhianna actually put out a public notice on line during the fire asking for a family to look after him and we got a response. He went to them until about August. We were allowed to have him in the hotel with us, but felt the room was too small for him and we were all at work during the day. Then a neighbour from Hurstway Walk took him in. We were paying her weekly to look after him, but it was getting too hard for her so we had to find another owner for him. He has now gone to Acton to live there permanently. It is really very sad. He's half pug, half jack Russell. We are not getting him back. Our contract for this temporary accommodation says no pets.

## Housing

82. We were asked if we wanted to go back to the Estate and they seemed to think it would be safe. We had had a leak that flooded the downstairs, and they said they were spending money to fix this. However, I am not convinced that they will be able to rectify the internal problems in the estate.
83. I don't feel safe going back. We were too close to what happened. We saw too many people burning. You don't realise how affected you are by it until you realise you're not sleeping.
84. I feel that no one was there from the council when we needed them most. These homes are theirs. I wish that someone from RBKC or the TMO could have been there just to give us a pat on the shoulder and say it's going to be ok – either on the night of the fire or in the days after. This is when we needed them the most, when we were naked and desolate. We were abandoned until the Queen appeared; it was at that point that the Council took notice. Their attitude towards us changed and they have started to listen, though, I am not convinced that they are listening entirely.
85. I think it would have made the world of difference if they had been there on the night to offer some reassurance. They are in part to blame for why we won't go back – they told us that it was safe and then at the same time another member of the council told us that it was unsafe for us to go back. This meant that we were very conflicted about whether we could go back or not. Officials had no idea of what was wrong; when they told us we could go back, we did not have any electric or gas.
86. I was told that there were members of the council around on the night but that there weren't wearing official clothes so that they could hide from us.
87. We believe the council are playing games with us. On the one hand, they are leading us to believe that they will be helping us to settle and get our lives back together by rehousing us, but on the other hand they are misleading us about this. Since 16<sup>th</sup> June, we have been filling out forms for suitability, homelessness applications, rehousing applications. We have provided all the information that they require, but in November

2017 we had to do all the forms again and I had to provide proof that Naomi, Joshua and [REDACTED] were all living with me. They wanted our passports, birth certificates, work payslips, bank statements and letters with proof of name and address. They said that Naomi had moved out, which had never happened, and that Joshua needed to prove that he lived there because he was out visiting his girlfriend regularly. It was disheartening and shocking to find out that they had no clue of who was living there, despite having lived there for 28 years and paid rent and council tax.

88. As well as the trauma from the fire, being displaced and not being recognised as such is having a negative impact on my children's lives as young people.

**Statement of truth**

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

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:

15/05/2018