

**Witness Statement of: Maria Gil**

**No. of statement: 1**

**Exhibits: 10**

**Date of statement: 02.06.2018**

**GRENFELL TOWER PUBLIC INQUIRY**

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**WITNESS STATEMENT OF MARIA GIL**

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I, MARIA GIL, 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 initially moved into [REDACTED] Hurstway Walk either in 1977 or 1978 with my parents. The Walkways had been newly built, and we were one of the first families to move in.
3. The Council moved us into the Walks after our Estate on Faraday Road, Ladbroke Grove was demolished. Several families from that community moved to the Walks with us, as well as into Grenfell Tower. We knew quite a lot of our neighbours because of that.
4. We have lived in the community for decades and so the family knows a lot of people who live in the Walkways and the Tower.
5. In 1992 I moved into my current flat in Hurstway Walks with my daughter, who was a baby at the time and my now ex-husband. At the time of the fire, I lived in the flat with my 26 year old daughter, her six year-old son and our two cats.
6. From the living room window of the flat you can see Grenfell Tower. The balcony faces the other Walkways and you can see the Tower clearly as well.

14<sup>th</sup> June 2017

7. I was at home on the 13<sup>th</sup> June. I went to bed at around 12:30am, as I had to be up at around 7am the next morning to attend a training course I was taking. At around 1.15am my daughter started shouting for me to wake up as something was happening outside. She hadn't gone to bed yet and so she was awake and heard the commotion outside. She kept insisting that I come to the window. I was still half asleep and so, in my dream state, I just thought it was probably people arguing outside. At first I didn't get up, but she was insistent and forced me to get out of bed. The first thing I heard when I got up was screaming from outside.
8. I went to the living room window and that's when I saw the fire. It was so close I was afraid it was going to leap onto our building. I didn't realise at this moment that it was Grenfell Tower which was on fire. We then went onto our balcony and I realised that it was Grenfell Tower which was on fire. It was such a shock.
9. We had a very clear view of the Tower from our balcony. I could see lots of people standing on/at their balconies in the Tower. I could hear them screaming, "Fire! Fire!, Help! Help!" I heard the screams all night.
10. It was difficult to tell where the fire began or ended, it was just rolling across the Tower. It was such a horror to see. I couldn't believe it.
11. I was concerned that the fire was going to spread onto the Walkways and the surrounding area as it was already so close. At around 1.30am I called the Emergency Services. I told the call-handler that I assumed someone else must have called before me, but I wanted to make sure that they were aware of the fire. They told me that they were aware of it and that they were on it. At around 1:37 am my daughter took a short video of the Tower from the balcony which she sent to me, you can hear someone from inside the Tower screaming "help" this exhibited here as **Exhibit MG/1**.
12. I then got dressed and rushed outside with my daughter. We were standing in the area between the railway line and Hurstway Walk, quite close to the Tower. We got as close as possible to Grenfell Tower, it was just instinct; I felt that I needed to see what was

happening and if I could help. At that time, there were about eighty people standing with us watching the fire and taking videos on their mobiles, but the Emergency Services had not arrived. It was chaos, people were scared and angry.

13. I took a couple of videos of what I was seeing on my mobile phone which I now exhibit to this statement, **Exhibit MG/2** is a 15 second video I took at 1:47am, **Exhibit MG/3** is a 1 minute 3-second-long video I took at 1:48am. My daughter was also taking videos at the time and she also sent me these, I exhibit here as **Exhibit MG/4**, an 8 second long video taken at 1:45am.
14. Soon after, I just saw fire everywhere, from the bottom of the Tower, to the top. It is very difficult to know now where the fire was. I could see fire coming out from everywhere. I was absolutely horrified and shocked. I saw so many things that night.
15. I remember in one of the top flats, maybe the twenty-first floor, a man made a rope from some material, maybe sheets or scarves, and he was dangling it from his window. It looked like he was trying to escape, but it was nowhere near long enough for him to climb down and it barely reached the floor below. I could see other people in windows with flash lights trying to let people know that they were there. I could see the little heads of children in the windows. I could hear screaming from inside the Tower, the screaming continued all night. People were just trying to get out. It was horrific. The hissing of the fire was so loud, and we could see large pieces of the building falling to the ground.
16. Just before 2am the Police came. I know this because I took a video on my phone at 1:54am which is 1 minute 29 seconds long (**Exhibit MG/5**). The police started to tell us to move back from the Tower. I remember thinking 'Where are the firemen?' It had been a while since I had called the emergency services myself, and others must have called before I did. I was thinking why was it taking them so long to get here?
17. I first saw firefighters arrive at around 2:18am, I know this because my daughter who was standing with me took a video (**Exhibit MG/6**) and a time stamped picture (**Exhibit MG/7**). They couldn't get their truck anywhere near the Tower because the road was blocked from two directions.
18. There had been roadworks going on for several weeks before the fire and Bramley Road was completely blocked off. There was a massive hole in the ground. I believe it was because of

gas works. It took the firefighters forever to figure out how to get in, to get near to the tower and the fire. It was incredibly frustrating to watch. Eventually the fire fighters just came on foot, and then they couldn't get the standpipes open. It was 3am before I first saw any water being poured on the fire.

19. When the firefighters did spray the water, the water didn't even reach the middle of the Tower block; it wasn't doing much to contain the spread of the fire. The entire process was so slow moving, it was torture for me to watch. I wanted to do something, but I couldn't.
20. I saw that some people managed to get out of the Tower, but I also saw two bodies on the ground that night. I saw the bodies of two adults; I was standing close enough to see their faces. At first they were gasping for air and I could see the paramedics trying to save them, but then they stopped and placed sheets over them and took the bodies away.
21. I felt on seeing these things, a hundred things at once, I couldn't even cry; it didn't feel real. I thought it was a nightmare and I was going to wake up.
22. The pub opposite my flat, called Garden Grill Bar was being used for emergency treatment. An ambulance was parked near it.
23. Everyone watching the Tower burn was frustrated. Some of the young people standing with us were arguing with the police and firemen to let them go in to the Tower and help the people struggling to escape. One young man was on his mobile pacing up and down around us he looked desperate to go in; other people were also on their mobiles some were crying and they all looked anxious; they must have had family or friends in the Tower. I saw a mother run out of the Tower with her three children, a fireman started shouting at her for not staying put in her flat as she had been told. It was unbelievable.
24. Then I saw helicopters arrive a little after 3am and I thought that they were going to drop water on the fire and save people as the fire hoses just weren't working, but we then realised that they were media helicopters and not the emergency services.
25. At around the same time we were told that everyone had to be evacuated out of the Walkways. No one could come back into the Walkways. It was pure panic; I had to get my family out: my parents and my teenage niece, [REDACTED] were still in their flat, and we had left my grandson asleep at ours. My dad was 82 years old at the time and wouldn't

have been able to move quickly. I rushed back, and I managed to get my family and pets out. All I managed to get of my belongings was my small bag with my passport and my keys. I remember trying to wake my grandson up and it was very hard. I knew I didn't have much time and couldn't be gentle with him; he had to know straight away that it was an emergency and that he needed to get up and out so I had to tell him the truth, that there was a fire.

26. We were not allowed back into our flats, and it was unclear how long it would be until we were, so we were stood outside on the side roads all night, sitting down for parts of it and pacing around at other times. At this time, as everyone was outside together, there was a lot of speculation and fear. My family took turns trying to keep my grandson calm, he was cold and scared. People were saying that the building was going to fall and collapse.

27. It was hard to know what to do, we tried to protect the children from watching the fire but as much as you try to, it was hard to avoid. My daughter and my grandson both had very close friends who they had grown up with who lived in the Tower. As we have lived in the area for decades we also knew and recognised a lot of the families in the community. I knew them all personally, many were all missing for weeks; there were posters up everywhere. I was shocked, devastated and in disbelief. In the days after the fire I felt completely shattered, numb and horrified.

28. We knew the El-Wahabi family, my daughter was friends with their son Yasin for many years they had the same group of friends. His entire family died in the Tower, There was a little Columbian girl, Jessica Urbano; I knew her parents well as they used to live directly opposite me in in [REDACTED] Hurstway Walk before Jessica was born. I was very familiar with Jessica's mother, I used to visit her often at their home and we'd have coffee together; Jessica was born after they moved in into the Tower. The little boy Isaac Paulos was a very close friend of my grandson, they would play together at their school and also in the community after school. I would also often see Steven Power around in the community, walking his dogs - he loved his dogs. So many of the people who died in the Tower, I knew or recognised; although I might not have known all their names, we would always greet each other when we ran into each other as neighbours. I find it difficult to think and talk about the deceased.

29. Between 3am and 4am the reporters, journalists and TV crews started coming.

30. We had been asking the police all night when we'd be allowed back in and all they said was "not any time soon". By 7am, the fire was still burning, and it became clear that we wouldn't be allowed back into our homes. I remember a police officer telling me that we had to find somewhere else to go but could not tell me when we'd be allowed back. I asked where we were supposed to go, and they told us to go to the Harrow Club where we could stay or get more information, but with two elderly parents, young children and pets, that wasn't an option for our family. I decided that the best option was for us to stay in my brother's flat [REDACTED] and he came to collect us at around 7:30am. We had been standing outside, watching the devastation from about 1.15am.

### Impact

31. We had a clear view of the Tower from my brothers flat, I had taken a couple of videos of the Tower from my brother's balcony, the first was from when we first arrived at his home is a minute-long video taken at 7:54am and exhibited to this Statement as **Exhibit MG/8** I later took another short 22- second long video at 11:56am (**Exhibit MG/9**) and a 1 minute 2 second video (**Exhibit MG/10**), but I couldn't bear to carry on watching it. I was completely shattered that day. The fire was burning for over 24 hours.

32. I remember that the day after the fire, people were still scared. There was a rumour that there might be an explosion as they never turned the gas mains off.

33. We stayed with my brother for three or four days, but staying there wasn't a practical option as he has his own family, with two young children and there was not enough space for us all.

34. It quickly became clear that you had to go to the Westway Sports Centre for information. I first went on the second day after the fire, and I went back daily asking for information on where we were going to stay. I asked them to tell us the truth and to tell us what was going on and what was going to happen to us and our housing situation. They told us on each occasion to be ready as they promised to call that night to tell us which hotel we were going to but nobody ever called. I kept having to go back the next day and I was never able to speak to the same person, it was always a different person standing in for the RBKC housing department but it was never someone who actually worked for RBKC it was always someone who worked for another Council like Ealing or Camden. For a long time there

were no representatives from RBKC to approach and explain to us what was happening. We felt neglected.

35. After the third day, I lost it, I just flipped, I said to the Housing staff representing RBKC that we couldn't keep staying with my brother. I remember seeing them looking a little embarrassed; because I put my foot down they had a young woman make several calls and after a long while she confirmed that she found us rooms at a hotel. Our stay was initially only approved for three days. On the day after we checked into the hotel, someone from the council came to see us to take a statement and they then extended our stay to four weeks. We are still living here to this day.

36. At the time that we were eventually allowed back into our flats, there was no hot water, no gas and no electric. This went on for months and I could not take my family back there. The thought of returning to our flat has been difficult. My daughter is determined that she will not be returning, because she's traumatised and doesn't want to go back there as it will bring back all the memories from that night and of the people we knew; every time we pass the area it's like walking through a funeral or graveyard.

37. Our current situation, which is living in a hotel, is not suitable for our family. We have no certainty; it is only at the end of each month that we find out whether we will be allowed to continue staying. You are never really comfortable, we can't cook our own meals so we're eating either ready meals or going out for food which is very unhealthy. There is no space or privacy.

38. The experience has been the most disruptive for my grandson: there are the practical things like he does not always make it to school on time as the taxi which collects him was sometimes late. I think his school work has suffered because of everything that has happened. The hotel room is not a home. He doesn't have his toys around him or any space to play, we have to take him out regularly so he can stretch and play. I just want my family's housing situation to be sorted out. My grandson has been affected in other ways by what has happened, by the trauma of it all. He was constantly drawing pictures of the Tower and the fire for some time. I don't want to go into detail about this in this statement

39. For the first couple of weeks after the fire everyone was in shock. I was, I had to be, concerned about the practicalities and making sure that my family had somewhere to stay and that they were okay. I didn't have time to process anything that had happened; the

adrenaline was the only thing getting me through. But then it hit me. I started to have nightmares; I can still hear the people screaming for help and the hissing of the fire, I can feel the heat and the smell the burning of the fire.


40. We know families who have died in the fire and this has been difficult for us all. Since the fire I have suffered from the trauma of what I witnessed. I will not go into detail about the extent of how this has impacted on my life and health in this statement.

41. We have been very run down and this has caused further stress and health issues to the family. It has affected our physical and mental health and it has changed our lives. There was a lot of smoke, dust and fumes in the area after the fire, which we must have breathed in. Again, I don't want to go into detail about this in this statement because it is personal information to my family.

#### **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: 2/06/2018