

**Witness Statement of: Mohamed Yahya**

**Number of statements: 1**

**Exhibits: 2**

**Date of statement: 1 June 2018**

## **GRENFELL TOWER PUBLIC INQUIRY**

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### **WITNESS STATEMENT OF MOHAMED YAHYA**

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I, MOHAED YAHYA, will say as follows:-

1. This statement is my account of events that took place on Tuesday 13 June 2017 into the early hours of Wednesday 14 June 2017, which I make for the purposes of Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry. I would wish to make a further statement to address issues falling to be dealt with in Phase 2 of the Inquiry.

#### Background

2. My name is Mohamed Yahya and I am a core participant to the Inquiry. My date of birth is [REDACTED]
3. I have lived in Lancaster West Estate for 38 years. I moved to Grenfell Tower ("the Tower") with my wife, Khadija around 1986 after the birth of our first child. We lived in flat 42 on the sixth floor (previously the fourth floor) for 18 years. We then moved to Barandon Walk and have been living here for over 20 years. Our flat is on the first floor of Barandon Walk. It is in the middle of the walkway and the view from our balcony outside our front room looks out onto the South and East side of Grenfell Tower.

4. I live in the flat with my wife, Khadija [REDACTED], my daughter, Ikram [REDACTED] and my son, [REDACTED]
5. I have three other daughters who live locally too. The eldest is Rabia and she is [REDACTED] in May. Then there is Elham who is [REDACTED] She lives in [REDACTED] Ebtissam is [REDACTED] and at the time of the fire lived in [REDACTED]
6. My three eldest daughters are married and I have six grandchildren. My wife looks after our grandchildren when my children are at work and any other time they want to come over. Our house was always known as 'Nanna's house'. Rabia's children went to [REDACTED] so every morning and afternoon they would pass our flat. They would come in at least once a day but quite often more for food, to relax and generally just catch up with us. Khadija would always be cooking.
7. Rabia lived at Flat 152 of Grenfell Tower. I can see her flat from my balcony. It used to be on the fifteenth floor but, following the refurbishment, it changed to the eighteenth floor. She lived in a two bedroom flat which had windows on both the East and South façades of the Tower. She lived with her three children [REDACTED] who is twelve years old, [REDACTED] who is nine years old and [REDACTED] who is four years old. Rabia was pregnant at the time of the fire with my granddaughter, [REDACTED] who is now six months old. [REDACTED] was named after a good friend of hers, [REDACTED] who died in the fire.

#### Community

8. We have a very stable community. Everybody gets on. There is a complete mix of people. Everybody is friendly and well-mannered and we recognise almost everybody to at least say hello to one another. Our community spans from Latimer Road right back to Golden Road. A lot of people know our families. We have all gone to school here and our children have grown up together. Even our

grandparents have the same circle of friends. It is very much a tight-knit community.

9. I have a lot of very close friends and family here. There are a number of families who live in the area who have come from the same town as my family back in Morocco. We all know each other very well. We would go to each other's weddings and socialise quite frequently. We were very close with the El-Wahabi family.

#### 14 June

10. I was at home with Khadija on the evening of 13 June. Some time during the early evening, Khadija had received a call from Rabia saying that [REDACTED] asthma was playing up. After the call, Khadija wasn't feeling too well. She put it down to her [REDACTED] and took some medication. It was Ramadan and we were supposed to be going to mosque later that night but I told her to rest at home. I left for mosque around 11.45pm. I met my friend Abdul Haziz El-Wahabi at the mosque.
11. I drove back from the mosque and arrived back to the flats around 12.30am. I parked the car on Treadgold Street. I said goodbye to Abdul and we both headed home. I walked down Grenfell Road towards my flat.
12. When I got home, everyone was resting. I went downstairs into mine and my wife's bedroom and started to unchanged from my clothes I wore to mosque. Within 20 minutes of me being back home, the house phone starting ringing. Khadija answered and it was my sister-in-law who lives opposite the Tower. I could hear her screaming down the phone shouting something like "The Tower's on fire! Your daughter! Go get your daughter!" I was completely panicked at this point and was not sure what was going on.
13. Khadija and I both ran upstairs to the balcony and opened the balcony door. I looked and could see flames on the East side of the Tower. It looked like it was around the fourth or the sixth floor but my view was hindered so I couldn't see

properly. My wife was screaming “my daughter, my daughter!” I was also screaming, which woke up Ikram and [REDACTED]. Both of them ran over to us to find out what was going on. I just said we need to leave. I was in full on panic mode. Khadija grabbed an Abaya and head scarf that were hanging on the coat peg and we all ran out of the front door of the flat. I had no phone or no money on me but [REDACTED] had taken the keys to the flat. I think this would have been around 12.55 to 1am.

14. [REDACTED] ran down the corridor of the building to the fire exit which was the exit closest to the Tower from Barandon Walk. I followed him. I was literally about six metres away from the Tower facing the East side. I could see flames inside one of the flats around the fourth to the sixth floor. I ran down the stairs and I could see about 20 firemen outside the entrance of the Tower just standing there as if they were waiting for something.

15. I then suddenly saw the window to the flat suddenly smash and fall from the Tower. The smoke was a white to grey colour and then fire burst out. The fire was like a gas fire blue. There were no fire alarms going off at all. I could hear so many people screaming and shouting inside the Tower. As I watched this happening, I was in complete disbelief and was petrified for my family in the Tower.

16. At this point, I went up to a policeman who was stood by the main entrance of the Tower and I explained to him that my daughter was alone in the Tower with her three children and so she wouldn’t be able to bring them all down safely. He said I couldn’t go in and started pushing me away. I became very frustrated and demanded that he let me in and I kept repeating that I needed to go inside because my family were in there. The officer just kept saying that I wasn’t supposed to be standing here and that I needed to go away. I was so frustrated and couldn’t control my anger because I was just desperate to get in to the Tower.

17. Whilst I was speaking to the policeman, I believe my son sneaked passed us and ran into the Tower. I know from him that he ran up the stairs of the Tower to try

and rescue my daughter and her kids. I was in such a state of shock I didn't even realise that he had gone. I didn't know that he had done this until later that night.

18. The police escorted me away from the entrance of the Tower, around Barandon Walk, down Grenfell Road to the corner of Bomore Road where the cycle hire station is. I have marked where I was standing on a map at MY/1. I think this was around 1.20am to 1.30am. There were around 20 people stood here. At this point the police officer who had escorted me left me there with two other police officers.
19. I looked at the Tower and could just see blue fire shooting straight up the right column of the East side of the Tower. I was speechless. I couldn't speak to anyone. I could see the fire continuing to rise up the right column. Then I saw the cladding was just falling down off the Tower. At the time, I didn't know it was called cladding but it looked like some sort of material from the outside of the building. I could hear the glass to the windows shattering too and people were screaming out for help.
20. The officers didn't let me stay at this corner for long and they started moving me and others down Bomore Road. I think they felt that it was too close to the fire and they were worried about things from the Tower dropping on us. A police officer escorted me down Bomore Road and we stopped at the corner of Bomore Road and Avondale Park Road. There were around 100 people standing there with me. People were screaming and crying. It was very chaotic.
21. I then saw my son at this corner. I have marked this on the map at MY/2. He told me that he had ran up the stairs of Grenfell Tower, reached the fourth floor but then a fireman was coming down the stairs and saw him with his torch light and made him go downstairs with him. I couldn't tell if he was out of breath or coughing because I was so fixated on Rabia and her children. I then saw my wife and daughter walking up towards this corner. I hadn't even noticed that they were not with me as I was so focused on Rabia and her children. They were with our extended family including my sister-in-law and brother-in-law. They were all in complete shock and completely panicked. So many people were crying.

22. There were rows of fire engines on Grenfell Road. I asked one police officer why the firemen were not going into the Tower and he said that he couldn't authorise all the firemen to go into the Tower until he had authorisation from the Chief. He said that the Chief was asking for the plan from the architect about whether the fire could be contained. The police officer said he couldn't lose the whole London fire brigade but that all London fire brigades were here. He said they had to check if the Tower was strong enough to hold the fire because they thought it was going to fall. I couldn't believe it. I was so shocked and angry at this point because I just thought my daughter was in there. I thought to myself "you won't let me in and you won't send anyone in to save her".

23. [REDACTED] at some point had gone back to the flat to get our phones Khadija passed me a phone and I spoke to Rabia on the phone and I put the call on speakerphone so we could all hear her. She was still in the Tower. I kept shouting at her saying 'come out! Why aren't you coming out?' She said that she couldn't as the smoke was so bad and whenever she opened her front door she couldn't see anything. She also said that the firemen had told her to stay inside. I was shouting at her saying 'don't listen to the firemen. Come out!' I could see the fire from outside and I could see that it was approaching her flat and yet the firemen were telling her to stay inside. I just couldn't understand it. I just thought to myself it was better for her to die trying then just burning alive and not even trying to escape. I couldn't understand why she was being told to stay when I could see the fire moving to where she was.

24. I told her to wet her clothes or towels and to put them round herself and her children. No one had told me about this advice on the night. It was something that I already knew to do in case of a fire. I told her to crawl when she came down the stairs, to walk like a blind person would, feeling the walls and to walk with her hands. I was trying to stay calm when I told her this. At one point, I remember she was saying her goodbyes to us all, saying sorry and to forgive her for whatever she had done. I was so upset and completely overwhelmed. I told her not to say goodbye and to get the towels wet whilst I was on the phone to her. She told me

that the fire was now in her kitchen. I think I was on the phone to her in the flat for around 30 minutes before she left her flat. A lot of my family spoke to Rabia that night including Khadija and [REDACTED]

25. I couldn't hear any fire alarm going off in her flat whilst I was on the phone to her. Rabia later told me that they had tested the fire alarm a couple of days before the fire. They had said that it was fine but on the night of the fire the alarm didn't go off. I find this very odd. The alarms in the corridor didn't go off either as I would have heard them when I was on the phone to my daughter.
26. Rabia opened the front door and had the phone on speaker as she did this. It must have been around 2.30am. From this point onwards she didn't speak to me. I could just hear her footsteps, shouting and screaming from others who must have been in the stairwell. I couldn't hear any fire alarms going off. Suddenly, I heard loud screaming and crying from someone but it was not Rabia. I could hear her telling someone to 'get down' and was saying 'follow me, follow me'. I later found out having spoken to Rabia when she was recovering from the fire that she had accidentally opened a door to someone else's flat and when she opened the door she saw a man who was about to jump out the window. His wife and kids were stood next to him trying to pull him down from the window. My daughter said she helped pull him down and told them to follow her down the stairs.
27. After this, I could just hear footsteps and screaming. Then, suddenly, I couldn't hear her anymore. That was it. I thought they had died. I was completely distraught and I broke down crying.
28. My wife was crying hysterically and when we couldn't hear Rabia anymore she fainted. Someone started giving her water. Someone around the area gave me a chair to sit by Thresholds Place. I just sat there not knowing what was happening and had completely lost hope. I thought she was gone. I was in complete disbelief and shock.

29. Then, about 10 to 15 minutes later someone ran over to where I was sat and said that they saw my daughter come out of the Tower with her children and that she was alive. I can't remember exactly who this was but I think it was Khalid, my nephew. I couldn't believe it. I was so desperate for it to be true. I just needed to go to where she was and see for myself. So they told me whereabouts she was and I started rushing to where she was.
30. I went with some family members back to Avondale Road. This road was blocked off for cars but there were a few ambulances there and we could walk down this road. My wife went in a car as she was not feeling well at all. We walked down Mary Place then onto Stoneleigh Place. We then walked up St Anne's Road until we got to Latimer Road Station. I can remember there being lots of ambulances by Latimer Road station. It was so busy and there were a lot of people here.
31. When I got to Latimer Road station, there were police officers blocking me from walking down the ramp way on Station Walk just off Bramley Road to get to the Tower. I said that my daughter had managed to escape from the Tower with her children and that I needed to go and see her. I was still in panic mode. I was with my brother-in-law at the time. Suddenly, I could see Rabia from a distance with a breathing mask on. I was completely relieved to see her.
32. I explained to a police officer who was keeping a line, that I could see my daughter and he asked if I was sure. He eventually let me pass but no one else was allowed through the line. I ran over to my daughter who was sat under a tree with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] was not with them. I hugged her and cried. She could barely speak because of the smoke inhalation and she was coughing a lot. [REDACTED] was coughing a lot but [REDACTED] was just quiet. Their faces were black and smelt very strongly of smoke. I think she told me at this point that [REDACTED] came out the Tower but she didn't know where he was. The paramedics asked us to go into a nearby pub and we went in there and sat down.
33. After my daughter was sat down with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], Rabia asked for her mum. I went to find my wife, Ikram and [REDACTED] to get them through the cordon to



see Rabia. The police officer didn't let my wife through so I just pushed her through so she could see her daughter. [REDACTED] stayed with some family members on the other side of the cordon. I went into the pub with my wife. She hugged my daughter and cried.

34. I then left my wife in the pub with Rabia, and went to find out where my grandson, [REDACTED] was. I told a paramedic who was outside that my grandson was in the Tower and had escaped but he was now missing. I wanted answers. I was panicking. The paramedic said he would go and find out for me. He came back very quickly and said that my grandson had gone straight into an ambulance to King's College Hospital. That is all he told me. I later found out that my daughter Ikram had gone into the ambulance with [REDACTED]

35. I went back into the pub and told my daughter and wife about [REDACTED] My daughter couldn't talk even though she clearly wanted to as she had the gas mask on. She was struggling to breathe and was continuously coughing.

36. After about 20 minutes the paramedics walked my daughter and my two grandchildren to the ambulance. The paramedic told us that they were going to the Royal Free Hospital. I was confused and asked why they were being taken to a different hospital to [REDACTED] and the paramedic explained that the children's specialist hospital was at King's College Hospital.

#### Immediate aftermath

37. After they all got into the ambulance, I tried to go back to my flat so that I could get my keys to the car to immediately drive to the hospital. The police officer wouldn't let me to the building in so I walked back to Latimer Road station where my wife and [REDACTED] were with the rest of my family. My nephew, Khalid said that he would drive us to the Royal Free Hospital, which he did.

38. When we arrived at the hospital, I went to see [REDACTED] and Khadija went to see [REDACTED] I then went to see Rabia. Ashraff stayed in the waiting room with the

phones and answering phone calls because there was no signal in the hospital. It was horrible seeing my family so vulnerable and not knowing if they were going to survive. I then was driven to visit [REDACTED] at King's College Hospital.

39. In the evening of 14 June, I went back to my flat to try and get my keys to the car. At the entrance to Barandon Walk, there was a police officer and I asked if I could go inside to my flat. He said that I could not stay the night there. I just explained that I needed the keys to my car and some money. People who were stood around by the entrance heard what I was saying and started offering me money. I felt touched by this but I didn't want their money as I just wanted to get the keys to my car and leave. The police officer said that I would have to ask the superior officer and pointed him out to me. I went and told this officer that my daughter was in hospital and that I just wanted to go inside and get the keys to my car. He agreed to me doing this. A police officer escorted me in the building and I quickly went inside my flat. As I entered my flat, I could instantly smell smoke. The balcony door was still open which had let even more smoke in. It was horrible. I just quickly picked up my keys and wallet and left. I stayed with my brother-in-law who lives nearby. My wife and Ikram stayed there too.

#### Aftermath

40. For the next few weeks I was driving to and from hospitals to visit my family. Rabia was in an induced coma. She was in a coma for three weeks and she was in hospital for over a month. The doctors had to put her into an induced coma because she had so much internal damage from smoke inhalation. She required two operations and she lost her voice. For a long while she was unable to breathe on her own. There were tubes everywhere. She was pregnant at the time of the fire and thank god the baby was safe and survived this.
41. My grandson, [REDACTED] was also in a coma and he was like this for about 10 days. When Rabia had recovered she told me that on the sixth floor, [REDACTED] had fainted and luckily firemen had just come down the stairs at that point and picked him up. My daughter and the two other children then followed him all the way down the

stairs. My youngest granddaughter, [REDACTED] was surprisingly better. The doctor at the hospital even said it was a miracle that she was this way. My eldest granddaughter, [REDACTED] was in a coma for 11 days.

42. I would drop my wife to the hospital where my daughter was being treated and then I would take my son and daughter to Kings Cross Hospital to see my grandchildren. On some days, we would swap and I would see my daughter and my wife would see the grandchildren.

### Impact

43. Before the fire, I would see Rabia and her children almost everyday. Since the fire, they have been moved into temporary accommodation near [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I try to still see them everyday. I worry a lot more about Rabia and her children's health and safety.

44. Since the fire, my wife has not been the same. It has been really sad to see her going through all of this. She tries to support the family but it is hard for her and she is often tearful. My wife used to be the strongest one in the family but now I have to be the strong one trying to keep everyone together.

45. My wife and I moved back to the flat about a month after the fire. It isn't nice living here, seeing the burnt Tower everyday but I am retired and have a lot of family who live around this area.

46. I try to stay strong but this fire and the aftereffects have had a massive impact on me and my family. I feel very frustrated about what happened that night and the problems that it has now caused for my family. The shock of the horrific events on 14 June has been terrible. The ongoing impact on my family and life has been huge. I don't want to in this statement go into detail about the full impact that this has had on me, my wife, and 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: 1/6/2018