

HURSTWAY WALK

The evening of the 13 June 2017

5. I was resident at [REDACTED] Hurstway Walk at the time of the fire, and I was at home on the evening of 13 June 2017.

The morning of the 14 June 2017

6. The fire within Grenfell Tower started at 12:54 am in the morning, I understand.
7. I became aware of the fire at about 1:15 am on the morning of 14 June 2017. A neighbour from [REDACTED] on Hurstway Walk came round. I know her only as Luly, she is a [REDACTED] lady, who is friendly with and close to my mother. Luly said, "There's a fire at the Tower!", referring to Grenfell Tower. She said that a friend had called her from Grenfell Tower and that she had already been down and seen the fire. She came back to warn us because she knew my mother, Buniya, would need a long time to get out of Hurstway Walk.
8. I did not think too much of it at the time. I went to the bathroom and could hear people were screaming. I woke up my mother, and asked her to get changed. I took my dog and went down the stairs, and out on the side of the Latimer Road station exit.
9. Luly from [REDACTED] had knocked on everyone's door in the block to make sure that they knew there was a fire in the Tower. The corridor was full of people trying to get out, lots of confused children, and people who were half asleep. There were people coming in and going out, taking stuff and leaving. It was a big commotion and panic.
10. I went through the Latimer Road Tube station entrance. No cars could down that way. It is very narrow and there are trees planted in that are which had prevented fire engines from coming down.
11. Outside the Tube station there was a mass of people screaming and shouting to try and wake people up others. There were a lot of conversations about how everybody was scared, about how the Tower might fall on our building, and about if anybody had formal instructions from the police or the Fire Brigade as to what to do. Everyone wanted to know if we had been officially evacuated and where we might need to go.

12. I think there were about 3 fire engines at the Latimer Road station, initially, and lots of firefighters could be seen around the outside of the Tower.
13. At that point I saw the fire for the first time.

My experience of the fire

14. I recall my initial impression of the fire. It was by far the biggest fire I had ever seen. I could smell it before I could see it. It smelt like burnt rubber, or a burning tyre. Before I could even see the Tower, I could smell that heavy burning smell like rubber.
15. The fire looked like it was just running up one side of the building, which looked to me to be the west side of the building. It was possibly four floors high at the time I first saw the fire. This would have been only a very short while after Luly woke me up, perhaps no more than maybe 5 minutes. At approximately 1:20 am.
16. The flames had started to spread up, and then across, directly facing the academy. Within an hour it was just a ring of fire around the whole tower, with black smoke going up into the sky. I am pretty sure that within an hour it had engulfed the building, from where I was standing and could see on the Latimer Road side. Lots of windows were open as it had been a hot night and people had clearly left them open.
17. At first, there was thick smoke which was black and grey. It was heavy and going up high into the air. Initially with the flames upwards and then across. Then about an hour later the thick smoke started to disperse outwards, so those of us stood nearby the Tower had to move further away as the smoke was coming in our direction.

My experience of the fire fighters

18. I encountered lots fire fighters outside of the Tower. I do not know much about the fire fighters, but I had not seen anyone work so hard. They all worked hard that night. I did not know that firefighters actually cared so much, and I have never seen anyone cry or scream

that much before. They were absolutely incredible, and they were under so much pressure and emotion.

19. The fire fighters at that early stage of the fire were absolutely frantic, running around trying to put out the fire but I could see that they were also getting people out of the building.
20. There were a few floors below the fire where the fire fighters were grouping. They were going in and out to bring people outside the Tower. They came out one by one looking like what I can only describe as “zombies”. They looked after each other when they came out, and then another team would go back in the burning building. They were really brave in my opinion.
21. From about 1:30 am to 3:00 am there was a constant stream of fire engines coming to the area. They were using hoses to put the fire out from all directions outside of the building, but most of the fire was on side, possibly where it had started, and it looked like they were unable to get to that side of the building.
22. Some of the fire fighters were crying, and some of them were screaming about the fact that they could not get around the other side of the building. One of them shouted loud, “Which idiot designed this?”, which I understood that he was talking about the fact that they could not properly get to their hoses to one side of Grenfell Tower .
23. I saw a fire fighter and I asked, “How bad is it?”. He said, “It’s the worst I’ve seen in my life and I’ve been doing this for 20 years.” I saw another one and he said, “I would suggest you get as far back as possible because of the smoke. It’s very harmful.”
24. At approximately 2:00 am two fire fighters were running on each side of our building and running downstairs to the shared garages, and they said they were turning off the gas for the block. I think they meant our block, but it could have been the gas for Grenfell Tower. I really cannot be sure.

Outside the Tower

25. I went back to see my mother, and she was in a panic and did not know what to do. She would have been overlooking a busy street.
26. I went round to the small children's playground in the walkways, and I could see the faces of people in the tower and hear them screaming for help. I could hear and see people from the Fire Brigade shouting, "Get out get out". I believe this was about 3am, but I cannot be certain.
27. It felt and looked like a warzone, and there were helicopters overhead. People were screaming and crying.
28. There were chunks of something falling off the tower, and bit like wafer-thin paper burning and floating in the air. I did not know what it was at the time. People have since said that it was parts of the cladding, but I do not know if this is the case.
29. I saw two people who had faces covered in soot, and they were being rushed out by one of the Fire Brigade staff. One of the survivors was crying.. People were screaming everywhere from up in the Tower and outside. It was a horrible scene.
30. At this point, I was mesmerised by the fire. I could not take my eyes off it. I was not sure what everyone was waiting for at this point but their eyes fixed were on the fire, and the Fire Brigade began to tell people outside the Tower to leave the area. They wanted to clear the immediate vicinity of the Tower itself.
31. The police started to arrive at this point and tried to get people on the ground out of the way. My guess, because I had not looked at my phone, was that this was nearly 3:00 am by this point.
32. I went back and forth from the Tower to the walkway, twice. The second time I went back I saw fire fighters who told me that they were turning the gas off in the walkways because the gas was connected to Grenfell Tower. This explained what the fire fighters had been doing earlier.

33. When I went downstairs again, towards the Tower, the police directed us to leave the walkway, because they indicated to us that they were afraid the Tower might collapse on us. I went back up to my flat and quickly got changed (I had been wearing a dressing gown until this point). I immediately got my mother.
34. I and my mother left the flat at that point. It was about 3:00 am or 3:15 am. I found a fence where my mother was able to sit, but I did not want to sit still. I just wanted to see what was happening, as I was full of nervous energy.
35. I and a few other people were going around the Tower. We decided to try and do something to help, so we began screaming and shouting together at the windows that were not on fire in the Tower and trying to make sure people inside woke up. Fire fighters were also shouting for people to get out, too.
36. Part of me thought that people would get out, but I could see that this was a massive fire and that for some it would be completely impossible to leave from high up.
37. The fire engines were actually on the side of the station, by Bramley Road, and there were no fire engines that could fit immediately in front of where the fire had started.
38. I asked my mother whether she wanted a taxi to see my sister, and if she wanted to stay with her. She wanted to stay and help the survivors in the Tower, and asked me to go and get water from back in Hurstway Walk. I went in and brought out some water for the fire fighters to drink. I saw fire fighters outside. To me it looked like some had burns on their hands. .
39. I saw very few people coming out of the Tower. One family appeared to be Moroccan, the other Somali, and they were sat in ambulances but then taken away.
40. I was only able to get very close to the Tower at approximately 1:20 am, which was when I first arrived there, before the police started to push everyone back. It was not so much conversation that were going on, but more like lots of residents throwing instructions at each other. Residents were saying things like, "Wake people up", "Get water", and a lot of young

men wanted to go inside the Tower to try and rescue people. That is when the police started to move everyone back.

41. There was almost a row at one point between someone who wanted to go inside to pull people out and the police who told them not to.

42. I do not remember the names of anyone specifically. I remember seeing my neighbours from [REDACTED], Luly, and my neighbours from [REDACTED] but I do not know their names. They were all crying. It was a very traumatic scene.

43. I did not see anyone come out of the Tower from 1:30 am onwards, so as a result I did not provide any assistance to survivors. I did get water from my flat and gave it to some people, basically to anyone who looked like they needed water.

44. I gave water to the firefighters, to elderly people, and other neighbours in the area. It was very hot and humid that night, and the fire was incredibly hot around the Tower.

45. There is a pub opposite my house, and I saw someone park their car in the middle of the road and sprint to the pub. The landlord started letting people in to sit down and get drinks, especially the shocked and frail people. A lot of people went into the pub to sit down and be with others.

46. I stayed in and around the Tower until about 6:00 am or 7:00 am. I went back to my flat and there was a lot of debris on the balcony. It was burnt, and I think it must have been burnt cladding though I cannot be sure.

I did not suffer any injuries, though I was really shocked and upset by the scene.

The events directly after

47. At about 9:00 am or 10:00 am on the morning of the fire, my sister came to pick up my mother up and took her to her house. I tried to go into work, not because I wanted to work, but because I wanted to be in a familiar, safe place. I work in a private equity firm. I did not

do any work, however. Being at work was just a safe place to be with others. The hospitals and religious institutions were full, and I wanted to see my neighbours.

48. We tried to contact the Tennant Management Organisation (“TMO”) but they did not pick up the phone at all. I did not get to speak to anyone at the TMO.
49. In the days that followed the fire, my mother and I were very confused. We knew that there was help in the “Westway Centre”, which is a sports centre. We thought that it was for the survivors of the Tower, to be honest. I thought that a lot of them were staying in the Westway.
50. There was so much on the news about the fire and TV cameras at the Westway, that my mother and I did not go near it. We only approached the Westway about two weeks later, and I explained our situation and that my mother was very scared and that we were all shocked by the fire. I spoke to Red Cross volunteers who were from Wales.
51. One of the people from the Red Cross asked where I lived and I gave the Red Cross my address. The reply was, “You don’t look like somebody who lives on the estate.” I said, “What does that mean?” The man’s reply was, “Well, look at you, do you have a full-time job?” I said yes and he said, “We can’t offer you any help.” I replied that I was not looking for any donations or money, but just to use a shower as we had no hot water (the Fire Brigade had cut off all the gas supplies to the area near the Tower) and I just wanted to get information. The man then said, “I think you’re too posh for this place, my love, there’s other people we need to see.”
52. I went back over to my mother and explained what had happened. She pushed her walker over in frustration, and complained in her thick Arabic accent. My mother has mobility issues. On seeing this, the Red Cross man stuck a tag on her hand, and they accepted to see her. They clearly thought that she looked like someone who needed help. I was then given a tag, as I was with my mother.
53. I then asked, “What is the help on offer?” and I was told that there was water and biscuits. I said I needed to understand what is happening and if we need to evacuate our flat. I said that there were rumours that the Tower might collapse on the walkways. I asked if the rumours

were true and if there was a risk of the Tower falling. The officials said that there was a Housing Department as part of the council, and that I should speak to them. I went and spoke to a woman who I believe was from the council. She was about my age, in her thirties, and she said, "What is it that you want?" Her initial communication to me was shocking. She seemed dismissive and could not understand that I wanted more information.

54. I decided at that point to seek my own legal advice to find out what we need to do to be safe in that area. It was clear that the council and the authorities were not going to give us any information, and we did not know if it was safe to be in our homes or if the Tower might fall on us. We were left in the dark.

Housing

55. I initially stayed in my flat in Hurstway Walk, in the weeks that followed the fire. My mother and I were not contacted by anyone to tell us what to do. We had no hot running water or gas, and that continued for weeks. The only running water we had was in the kitchen sink and in the bathroom upstairs, but it was cold without our gas heating system working.

56. About a month after the fire, based on the advice of my solicitor, I tried to move out of the flat.

57. I went to the Westway with my mother again, and tried to get re-housed. We were assigned a Key Worker called Althea Rowe, and she managed to get my mother accommodation in a hotel at the Radisson Blu, next to the Churchill Hotel. My mother then moved into the Radisson Blu.

58. It was an absolute nightmare during this period. I spent about £2,000 in 30 days on things like food, as we had to eat at restaurants, because we had no gas cook, I spent money on commuting back and forth because I had to go between [REDACTED] East Acton (to sleep at my sister's house) and the Radisson Hotel to see my mother.

59. While my mother was in hotel accommodation, she had a GP appointment. Her GP is based next to our flat. She came back for the night and stayed in the Walkway, ready to see the

GP. She woke up on the 14th August 2017 but struggled to come upstairs,

60.

61. I then called the Key Worker and insisted that going forward I should be re-housed in the same accommodation as my mother, either in adjoining rooms or at least in the same property. My Key Worker said she would prioritise this with the council.

62. On the 19th of August my Key Worker rang me to say that I would be re-housed in the same place as my mother.

The months following the fire

63. My mother and I were re-housed in the Radisson Blu Hotel.

64. I was not entitled to any food in the hotel, as I had a full-time job.

65. We were in the Radisson Blu from August 2017 until approximately January 6 2018. We were told by our Key Worker that we had to move from the hotel and that we had no choice. All the properties that suited my mother's physical needs were running out, and I was told by staff at the council that if we did not accept the property they were offering, then we would have to move back to Hurstway Walk.

66. At the hotel we had a budget of £30 per person, for food, but it was the same food every day. I think from October 2017 the council started paying my mother money for food in cash, so that she could go outside the hotel to buy food if necessary. It was not enough to live on, given the area that we were in. All of the nearby shops that my mum could go to were very, very expensive.

67. We were then moved into our current property in

68. My mother had put a lot of money into her old flat, and she hopes to go back at some point. The council have repeatedly told her that they would make a few changes to her old flat in order to allow her to move back in. They have added fire doors, for example.
69. We were asked by the council to make a list of changes we needed for our flat. My mother responded with a long list of issues. I do not want to go back and I do not want to be forced to go back to the flat.
70. RBKC did not start sending money to help me and my mother, until around October 2017. I accrued a lot of debt in the weeks and months following the fire, up until they started helping to pay for food and other items as we were living in a hotel.

Family life

71. Before the fire I lived with my mother, Buniya Ismail, in [REDACTED] Hurstway Walk. We live together now, but we are still in temporary accommodation.

Pre-fire life

72. I was a resident within the Hurstway Walk prior to the morning of the 14 June 2017. My address was [REDACTED] Hurstway Walk. I lived with my mother, Buniya Ismail, who was the main tenant of the property. I had lived there for about 13 years with her.
73. My mother had difficulties walking, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] I lived with her in order to provide assistance. I helped her with simple things, but on bad days she needed someone to help her in and out of the bath, etc.
74. The flat was in a very poor state when we moved in.
75. There were holes in the walls, there was a very old almost rotten kitchen. It had asbestos in the bedroom upstairs, which is actually the entrance level. The council removed the asbestos.

76. It was one of the worst kinds of council properties you could think of. Over the years, my mother must have spent £30,000 on improving it, over the complete sixteen year period.
77. Our flat had several smoke alarms. One was in the kitchen, one in the hallway, and one in the corridor downstairs, opposite the bathroom. They were fitted when we moved in 16 years before the fire at Grenfell Tower. They were upgraded about four years after we moved in, which I assume was done by the TMO. The only one that has ever gone off was the one in the corridor one, in response to toast burning in the kitchen. However, the kitchen smoke alarm did not ever go off.
78. There was a gap between the door and the floor, which let air in, and it made a horrible noise. I reported that to the TMO on six separate occasions. My mother has reported it maybe a hundred times. It was never been fixed by the TMO.
79. There were problems with electricity in the flat. In particular, the upper floor with the kitchen and living room. The circuit breaker would trip and we would have to reset the breaker.
80. The walkway was often very smelly from cooking. It was often from the corridors, as there are only windows on one side, and all the flats face each other in the corridor. All the smells go into the corridor. We would sometimes leave our front door open and then open the windows on the other side of the flat to get a draught in to push the smells out.
81. We begged for double glazing for the flat, and my mother offered to meet the TMO halfway if they agreed to pay for it. We had such large windows that we could not afford to change all of them. Every year the TMO told us, "Next year."
82. There was often a great mess with rubbish on the walkway. Rubbish would be left all over the corridor, and people did not use the rubbish chute. Sometimes on a Sunday I would just put residents' rubbish down the chute.

Concerns about fire safety

83. I had concerns (see below) about fire safety in the walkways. I did not speak to officials about it. I just remember having casual conversations in the park, or when walking my dog. I do not remember their names though.
84. Over sixteen years, we had three visits from people checking the smoke detectors. I think they could have been from the Fire Brigade but I am not sure,. To me they might have been from the building management.
85. Before the fire, we had prepared for what to do if there had been a fire in Hurstway Walk. I actually instructed my mum to get out using one of the exits at the end of the walkway corridor, and I always kept a chair on the ground floor by the bedroom window, in case my mother needed to get out and both exits were blocked, so that she could climb on the chair and then out the window.
86. That window was never locked, in order for us to be able to escape in the event of a fire.
87. I put several concerns (see below) to my mother and she put them forward at meetings with the TMO. She used to go with someone called Virginia, and other residents. I will list these below.

Fire Doors

88. I had concerns about the fire doors. They were wooden doors, not proper fire doors. The doors to both the flats and then the internal doors were all not fire doors.

Gas pipes

89. Another concern were the gas pipes in the corridor at Hurstway Walk, which were exposed. They ran along the top of the front doors to all the flats in Hurstway Walk. I discussed it regularly with other residents, and they took it to the TMO directly. There was a lady called Virginia (I do not know her second name), who used to work in the GP surgery, so we all

knew her, and she presented our concerns and worries to the TMO. I think that she raised this issue multiple times through the Residents' Association.

90. Despite the complaints, the gas pipes were never covered and I doubt that they have been covered even now.

91. On the night of the fire itself, many firefighters were running around Hurstway Walk attempting to turn the gas off, because they believed that it was connected to Grenfell Tower. I am not sure anyone understood the gas piping network in the myriad of buildings.

Fire fighter Access

92. A further concern I had was that the way in which the walkways were constructed would only allowed fire engines to access the outside, on for example Bramley Road, but the other side of the flats were internal and there was no ease of access for fire engines, as there is only a playground which is ring-fenced. So that within the Hurstway Walk, the flats facing Testerton Walk had no access for fire engines. That was a concern I had always had, but I did not report it to anyone.

The TMO

93. I raised some of the above concerns with other residents, but not the TMO. I lived there long enough to know what the TMO were like, and that they did not respond to things or at least they did not deal with them quickly.

94. The TMO would ignore my mother and me, and other residents, unless we made it feel like a life or death situation. Most of the time I did not have the energy to deal with them so that I got someone else to do the complaining. For example, my mother needed a shower upstairs and had done so for years. She [REDACTED] was told by the mobility team who look after disabled people that they could fit a shower for her upstairs in Hurstway, but the TMO said to her that they would not help her further if the mobility people put the shower in.

95. The TMO stated that they would refuse to maintain any adjustments to the shower not made directly by the contractors of the TMO. So my mother did not obtain the shower, as the TMO did not install it despite asking several times. This was representative of what it was like to deal with the TMO as a tenant.

Layout

96. The general layout of the Hurstway Walk and Lancaster West Estate, with its huge corridors and the windows at the top, with fire exits at each end, and rubbish rooms, is a disaster waiting to happen. The building had been designed to pack in as many people as possible onto the walkway, and the build up of rubbish would have made it difficult to escape on most days.

Doors

97. The main doors to the buildings were made of wood with some kind of plastic, and most days before the fire, the fob did not work. These were changed so many times without informing us. If the fob did not work then we would not be able to get out of the building in the event of a fire.

Concerns about modifications Grenfell Tower

98. I had the following concerns about the Grenfell Tower refurbishment. First, was the building of the academy. Second was the application of the cladding. Thirdly, I had concerns about the lack of transparency about the £8 million refurbishment and how it was going to be spent.

The Academy

99. One issue was that the Tower was completely surrounded by the academy, the walkways and the gym. There was no way to get close to the Tower in the event of a fire. Fire engines would not have been able to get close to it and I was concerned. I was also concerned about the children in the academy too, because it seemed so dangerous to have so many buildings so close together.

100. This issue was raised in the residents meetings, I was told by a neighbour (I do not know whom), prior to the building of the Academy. I was not allowed to attend however, as I was from Hurstway Walk.

Cladding

101. At the time I did not know that what was going up on the Grenfell Tower was called “cladding”, but it looked extremely cheap. It looked like laminated flooring stuck on a building, and from the naked eye it looked like it might be flammable. I would often say to people, “It looks like it might fly off.” There were a lot of residents who worked in construction and they often said that the whole thing was a joke and poor quality . This was the sort of thing that you heard in the community before the fire. I would hear these comments by chatting to people in the corridors, or in the parks, or outside of the Tower while it was being refurbished.

Transparency

102. The other issue was a lack of transparency about the money being spent. We were sent letters from the TMO in the post and it did not say specifically whether it would be £8m or £10m, but it mentioned that there would be refurbishment of the Tower. We got two more letters after that, from the TMO, but they did not properly explain why it was being done or what the purpose was. It was very widely discussed amongst all the neighbours were asking each other if they knew what was going on.

103. One neighbour, I cannot remember his name, but he worked in construction, said, “I’d love to see the asbestos report. I bet they haven’t checked before they started the refurbishment. They might have clad asbestos into the building.” I did not really understand the point he was making, but I understand it now that he was saying that the TMO just did not care about the building or the people inside when it came to the works. At the time, I just politely nodded. But this was indicative of the kind of concern that people had.

104. People did not trust the TMO with the refurbishment and they did not understand what was going on.

105. I had never been in the Tower, but I heard from other people that there was a concern that the fire exit was inside the Tower, and apparently it is like squares and squares of flats with the fire exit in the middle. Instead it should have run on either side of the building, they said to me. This was something that I had heard people talking about before the fire, but I do not recall who told me about this. I do not know if people raised this with the TMO or the council.

106. There was a man who I used to see when I was walking my dogs. He died in the fire. He had mentioned the lack of fire escape routes in the Tower a couple of times to me. I do not remember his name, though. He specifically mentioned that the fire exit route being in the centre of the building of Grenfell Tower was a worry for him. This was about two months before the fire.

Conclusion

107. I think this fire did irreversible emotional damage to me and my mother. Physically, I think it brought on her [REDACTED] Financially it has done damage to us as well. We spent Christmas in a hotel room. We have no idea what is next as regards our permanent home.

108. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] I try and not speak about it.

109. I have not wanted to see any of my old friends because I do not want to speak to them about the fire and what happened. Doing this statement has been really difficult for me.

110. It will take a long time to get back to normal, and I do not see that happening soon. I am frightened that I am going to be forced to go and live in the flat at Hurstway Walk. Grenfell Tower will always been on our minds if we are forced to live there.

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:A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rania Al-Douri', is written over a yellow rectangular highlight.**Rania Al-Douri****Dated: 23 May 2018**