

IN THE MATTER OF THE GRENFELL TOWER FIRE

WITNESS STATEMENT OF SALAH EDDINE CHEBIOUNI

I, Salah Eddine Chebiouni, born [REDACTED] 1972, previously of Flat 66 Grenfell Tower, Grenfell Road, London, W11 1TQ, WILL SAY as follows:

Background


1. My wife, Hanan Wahabi and I moved into Grenfell Tower in 2001, when our son Zakariya was around 1 years old. We lived on what was originally the 6th floor, and later became the 9th floor, of Grenfell Tower, in Flat 66. At the time of the fire, I lived in the flat with Hanan and our two children, Zak, who was 16 years old at the time, and [REDACTED] who was 8 years old. We had one pet at the time of the fire, a hamster named Cuddles. We were council tenants.
2. I've been married to Hanan for 19 years now. I was born in France, and French is my first language, but we met in Morocco, where I was living at the time. My mum told me, "*Salah, you need to get married this year*". I met Hanan in Larash. We chatted and she said she lived in London. When my mum and grandma visited her mum they realized they had known each other 35 years previously but had lost touch. It was like a fairytale! The next year we had a big wedding in Morocco.
3. I came to London on the 5th of September 1999 and on the 10th of September that year, I started working at the Virgin Roof Garden in High Street Kensington. I didn't speak any English so I worked as a kitchen porter. Over the next 3 years I worked my way up, becoming a waiter, then a barman, then a supervisor, and finally a manager. I won employee of the year 3 times and saw all the celebrities there, from Michael Jackson to Elizabeth Taylor, to Sylvester Stalone. I worked 16 or 17 hours a day

Name: Salah Eddine Chebiouni

Date: 03/07/2018

though, and after a while I got tired and resigned. Since 2012 I have worked full-time as a caretaker at a school in the St James area. I love it. I've lived in London for a long time now, so I speak and read English now, not perfectly, but well.

4. When we moved to Grenfell Tower, we thought our flat was beautiful. The rooms were big, there was a nice view, and we didn't live far from anything. We used to have security downstairs 24/7, though they were removed just before the refurbishment. I found Grenfell Tower a peaceful place to live. The kitchen and living room windows in our flat overlooked the Kensington and Chelsea Leisure Centre, and the windows in the bedrooms overlooked the Kensington Aldridge Academy. Hanan's eldest brother, Abdulaziz El Wahabi, lived with his wife Faouzia, and their 3 children, Yasin, Nur Huda and Mehdi on the 21st floor of Grenfell Tower, in Flat 182.
5. Our flat was originally a 2 bedroom flat, but I put up a partition in the living room to create a third bedroom for [REDACTED]. A floor plan of the flat is at Appendix I.
6. I don't remember anyone giving us information about fire safety when we moved into Grenfell Tower. I don't remember seeing any fire safety signs in the building when we moved in either, but after the refurbishment, they put signs up near the lifts. I don't recall what those signs said.
7. There were smoke alarms in the kitchen and corridor in our flat. During the time we lived at Grenfell Tower, the London Fire Brigade came to our flat about 3 times to check the smoke alarms. I don't have a record of the dates or years when they came. I don't think we asked them to come; they just came. On each visit, they said the fire alarms were fine. They didn't say anything else about fire safety in the flat. I never tested the alarms in our flat but they went off sometimes when we burnt things while cooking so as far as I know they were working in June 2017. I didn't know at the time of the fire whether there was a communal fire alarm in the building.
8. I had had fire safety training at the school where I work before June 2017, which was delivered by my manager at the time. During that training, we were told to evacuate everyone from the building in the event of a fire, but they said that if there was anyone disabled who was unable to leave the building unaided, we should leave them behind.

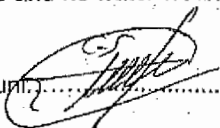
Name: Salah Eddine Cheblouni 

Date: 03/07/2018

in the classroom (provided there was no fire in the room) and close the door. They said that the doors would keep the fire out for 45 minutes, and that the firemen who attended the scene would be able to save them in that time. Based on this training, and on my experience of at least one previous fires at Grenfell Tower which had not spread (I describe this below), when my family and I learned of the Grenfell Tower fire in the early hours of 14 June 2017, I thought it would be safest for us to stay in the flat.

9. There was a vent in the ceiling of our bathroom from the time we moved in; it did not have an on/off switch, it was just a vent. When the windows were changed in our flat during the refurbishment, they installed a new kitchen window with an extractor fan.
10. I don't remember being able to smell cooking from other flats when our front door closed. We did hear children from other flats but nothing unusual. However, our neighbor in Flat 65 told me that she could hear me from my bedroom, when she was in her bedroom. As a result of this, she changed her bedroom around with the children, so that her bedroom was no longer close to mine and Hanan's. After they changed the bedrooms around, I could hear the children from my bedroom. We could also sometimes hear our upstairs neighbour jumping rope.
11. I can't recall having any problems with electricity in the flat, but we had chronic problems with flooding. There was an ongoing issue with flooding from the bathroom pipes in the flat on the floor above us, into our kitchen and toilet. This happened frequently, not daily, but maybe once every two months, and was never fixed. During periods of flooding, there would be continuous dripping from the ceiling. A good 2 buckets might be filled in a day. This was an issue before the refurbishment and persisted afterwards. We complained to the KCTMO a number of times but they refused to take any steps to address the issue. There were also leaks from our bathroom into the flat below us. The people living in the flat below us called the KCTMO many times but again, the problem was never fixed.
12. On 2 or 3 occasions, the water was turned off without warning. KCTMO did not tell us they planned to cut off our water supply, so when the children woke up in the morning they would open the tap and no water would come out. On a couple of occasions, they

Name: Salah Eddine Chebloun



Date

03/07/2018

accidentally left the taps open, the water was turned back on when we were out of the home, and when I came home from work, I found the flat flooded.

13. As a result of the problems we had with flooding, we had problems with mold in the flat. There was mold in my bedroom, Zak's bedroom, the kitchen and the bathroom. We tended to see the mold in the corners of the rooms, where the wall met the floor. Again, we reported this to KCTMO. They said to change the floors and give them a receipt for the cost. We also asked them for a dehumidifier to prevent the problem in the future, but they refused to cover the cost of this.
14. I usually used the lift to get to our flat from the building entrance, but I used stairs when both of the lifts were out of order. I found it difficult to use the stairs because I have health problems [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] I have suffered from numbness in my legs since about 2010 or 2011. The lifts frequently gave trouble though. Over the course of the years I lived at Grenfell Tower, I got stuck in the lift maybe 5 times. The longest period I spent stuck in the lift was about half an hour. The lifts were out of use quite frequently too. I would say that since the refurbishment began, both lifts were broken more than 10 times in a year. One of the lifts was broken maybe 20 or 25 times per year. I would estimate that on average it took the KCTMO 2 weeks to fix a lift when it was broken. When the lifts were broken, more severely disabled people had no way of getting to their flats if they lived on upper floors.

Refurbishment of Grenfell Tower

15. I was pleased when steps began to be taken to refurbish and improve the building. KCTMO sent us paperwork with photographs of doors, beautiful doors, asking us to choose which one we wanted as our new front door. It was only after they put in the new front door that I realised it wasn't fireproof; it was lighter than the old door, and when I opened it and looked at the spine, I could see that the door wasn't divided inside with different materials. I work in maintenance so I know a bit about these things. Also, the door didn't have the rubber thing that goes around the edge of the door to stop the smoke from spreading. I found the door draughty. I can't remember exactly when the new front door was installed but it was before the cladding was put

Name: Salah Eddine Chebfouni

Date

03/07/2018

on the outside of the building. I didn't complain about the new door; I said to the guy installing the door that it didn't look fire proof but he said it was. The new front door didn't close automatically. It had 3 hinges, a letterbox, a knocker and a peephole.

16. During the refurbishment, the builders wanted to install new boilers in the flats, including in our flat, which they wanted to put in the corridor near the front door. Hanan complained about the boiler being installed in the corridor as she felt it was a fire risk, as it would make the corridor narrower. Eventually they agreed to install the new boiler in the kitchen.
17. During the refurbishment, the contractors also installed a new exposed gas pipe in the building stairwell, which was the sole fire exit in the building. Hanan complained about this because she was concerned that this could be dangerous in the event of a fire.
18. Around the same time as the contractors started to install cladding on the exterior of the building, they changed the windows in our flat. The old windows were not double glazed, but they kept the outside air out. They changed the old windows to new, very draughty windows. The new windows were double glazed, they said, but I could feel the cold air blowing in through gaps in the frames. I watched as the contractors installed them. They didn't use any screws, just stuck in the window frame in the wall and then put some silicone foam around it. You could have removed the entire window frame with your hands if you used force.
19. Hanan went to many Grenfell Action Group meetings to discuss complaints about quality and safety concerns relating to the refurbishment. I didn't go to any of these meetings. I am a simple guy. Although I noticed the flaws in the refurbishment and understood the safety concerns, I wasn't particularly worried. You see, when you come to this country with nothing, no English, no money, you don't think you're going to have to fight about gas pipes and cladding. You expect to fight for your children to be better than you, but you assume that your flat will be safe; you don't expect to have to fight for that. I told Hanan, [REDACTED] *you fight on this, I will fight for money to send our children to university, or for us to be able to go on holiday to Morocco*". When I heard people talk about the gas pipes being dangerous, I thought,

Name: Salah Eddine Chebiouni

Date: 03/07/2018

"Well, maybe it isn't perfect from a health and safety perspective, but I come from Morocco! How bad could this be? It's England!"

Previous fires at Grenfell Tower

20. I am aware of 2 fires in the building since we lived at Grenfell Tower. The first was perhaps 8 years ago, a cooking fire inside Flat 64. I was at home. I can't remember hearing a fire alarm but we were made aware of the fire because we heard people's voices outside on our floor. The fire started in the afternoon. When I walked out of our flat I saw a little bit of smoke on landing. It was a small kitchen fire, and the fire services were able to extinguish it quickly.
21. The second fire was around 6 years ago. Someone intentionally put newspaper and rubbish in front of Flat 64 door and set it alight. That was a proper fire, with lots of smoke but it didn't spread. I was home with Hanan and the children. I can't remember where Zak was but I remember that Hanan and [REDACTED] went upstairs to Faouzia's house. I left the building – I wasn't told to, I just did.

13 – 14 June 2017

22. The 13th of June was a normal day. I would have taken [REDACTED] to school in the morning and I went to work, as usual. It was Ramadan, but I couldn't fast due [REDACTED] Hanan was fasting though, and we had guests over in the evening to eat with us. After work, I went to Portobello Road to buy food for *iftar*, the evening meal. I didn't notice anything unusual in terms of power or lights in the building that evening. Hanan, Zak, [REDACTED] our guests and I ate together in our flat that evening. Afterwards, [REDACTED] left for Al-Mahar, a mosque, to do the evening prayers. He went with his cousin Yasin, and some friends. [REDACTED] went to bed at her bedtime.
23. I drove our guests to their homes at around 11:30. I got back to Grenfell Tower around midnight. I saw someone I knew downstairs, Mohammed, [REDACTED] who had been visiting his dad upstairs. I can't remember Mohammed's last name. His dad lived on the 16th floor and I think he died that night. We chatted about [REDACTED] normal

Name: Salah Eddine Cheblouni

Date

03/07/2018

things. I took the lift back up to the flat.

24. According to the CCTV image I have been shown, Zak returned home at 12:38 a.m. Hanan and I went to sleep when he got in. The next thing I remember is waking up and wanting to go to the toilet. I don't know what time it was. As I walked towards the bathroom, I smelled a strong plastic burning smell. I thought, "*oh my god, Zak has left something in the cooker*", so I didn't go to the toilet. Instead, I went to the kitchen and opened the cooker, but there was nothing in it, and it was switched off. I couldn't find the source of the smell, which was stronger now, in the kitchen, than it had been in the hallway. I couldn't tell you if the kitchen was hotter than usual because I was panicking. I could see light grey smoke in the kitchen. No windows in our flat were open, except for our bedroom window. We generally kept the windows closed because people smoke and we worry about them throwing a lit cigarette down, and flame catching a curtain.
25. I heard crackling, like when you burn something. I turned to the left and could see flames coming up behind the kitchen window, like someone was having a bonfire just outside of my window. I wondered if it was fireworks or something, so I opened the kitchen window. Straight away, smoke came in and I felt an immense heat. I closed the window. I did not hear any fire alarms go off. This all happened very quickly, within a few seconds.
26. Then I walked into the living room, confused, and looked out of the window there. I opened the window and leaned forward. I could see flames below our flat, on the outside of the building, and I could feel intense heat. The fire looked like it was just a metre or two away. I closed back the window after just a couple of seconds.
27. I immediately went to Hanan and woke her up, telling her there was a fire. Then I went to Zak. He was lying down in his bed, but was awake. I'm not sure what he was doing, maybe listening to music. I told him that there was a fire in the building, but I wasn't sure where. He ran into the living room and opened the window. Immediately, flames shot up outside of the window, in front of his face. He closed back the window before the flames entered the flat. Hanan was in the living room too, panicking. I told her to

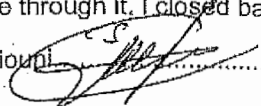
Name: Salah Eddine Chebiouni

Date

03/07/2014

calm down and get her mobile telephone, and I got my mobile phone as well.

28. As I've said above, I thought we would be safe in the flat. I thought the fire services would be able to put the fire out and that we would be safe in the flat in the meantime. I told Hanan and Zak that we should stay inside the flat. Luckily, they insisted that we get out. I now realise if we had stayed in the flat as I had suggested, we would be dead now.
29. Zak and [REDACTED] left the flat first, Zak carrying [REDACTED] Hanan followed next, carrying her mobile phone and her keys. I left the flat last, closing the door behind me. I also carried my mobile phone and keys. I did not lock the door behind me. It all happened so quickly that I didn't even think to call 999. When I left the flat, the flames were not yet inside it. I don't recall hearing any smoke alarms as we left.
30. I walked slowly as I left the flat. I didn't think the fire was that serious. I thought everything would be okay. I remember seeing light grey smoke on the 9th floor landing, like cigarette smoke. Apart from that, everything looked normal. The front doors of our neighbours were all closed. I did not see anyone else leaving their flat. I can't recall the landing being unusually hot.
31. I took the stairs down. I know that you must not use the lift during a fire so I did not consider using it. The door to the stairwell was closed. There was smoke in the stairwell. Again it was light, like exhaust smoke, pale grey in colour. The lights were on in the stairwell. I went slowly down the stairs. I couldn't see Hanan in front of me; she was gone already. The stairs weren't slippery and did not seem wet. I don't remember seeing hoses in the stairwell. I could smell that burning plastic smell. As I descended I could hear people speaking but couldn't tell where the voices were coming from.
32. Around the 6th of 7th floor, I saw a black guy with his daughter, I think he is from Somalia or Sudan. He is a small guy, and was wearing glasses. He was carrying his daughter, who I would say was around 3 years old. He asked me what had happened. He looked confused rather than scared. As we spoke, I opened the door onto what I believe was the 6th floor landing. When I opened the door, I saw thick, black smoke. It was impossible to see through it. I closed back the door and I was confused.

Name: Salah Eddine Chebioui 

Date: 03/07/2018

33. The guy with his daughter was initially behind me on the stairwell, but then passed me: I said, "*go, I am going slowly*". I was having a little bit of difficulty breathing as I went down the stairs, because of the smoke. Every time I breathed, I coughed.
34. At some point, I think it was on the 4th floor, I saw 4 or 5 firefighters standing in the stairwell. They didn't seem to be doing anything. They looked confused. They didn't say anything to me, and they didn't say anything to each other. One of them looked at me, then stepped aside a little bit so I could pass him, which I did.
35. The CCTV images I have been shown show Zak leaving the building, carrying [REDACTED] at 1:19am, Hanan leaving at 1:21am, and me leaving the building at 1:22am.
36. When I got out of the building there were bits of cladding which were alight and falling on the ground. There were a lot of people around, and I was looking for my wife and my children. I walked straight ahead and found Zak standing with his friend. Hanan was nearby, speaking on the phone. [REDACTED] was there too, shaking. I think someone had given her something to cover herself. Then I turned around and looked at the building. I could see lines of orange fire like train tracks, two lines going up to the 10th or 11th floor. The fire kept going up the building, faster and faster.
37. At that point, I didn't feel scared; I was confused. I wondered, "*when is the fire going to stop?*" I was in shock. I saw a helicopter. I could see firefighters, and fire engines. Hanan was stressed out, talking to her brother Abdulaziz, telling him to get out of the building. I heard her say to him, "*I will call you if the fire goes on your side. But you need to get out.*" Later, I remember her calling him again and crying and talking. I couldn't hear what she was saying. Zak was talking to Yasin. I wasn't focused on Abdulaziz and his family in the beginning. I was just trying to understand what was going on.
38. At some point, the fire started spreading across the perimeter of the building, at the top, towards the side of Abdulaziz's flat. Now I started to become worried. I remember the police told us to move back and then began to push us back. Hanan was in hysterics. I could hear children crying, and people shouting for help from the window.

Name: Salah Eddine Chebiouni

Date

03/07/2018

Someone from the crowd was shouting and someone screamed, "don't jump!" People were saying to the fire brigade that they should do more. The noise was unbelievable.

39. We were pushed further and further back. The building was now on fire on both sides. Hanan's sister Amina was with us, along with her other family members, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Around 10 minutes or so after we escaped from the building, many of Hanan's family members joined us.

40. [REDACTED] I wasn't feeling well, and was exhausted, so I took [REDACTED] and went to Hanan's sister Amina's house. We slept there, and woke up in the afternoon that day, maybe at 4p.m. or something. Then I walked back to Grenfell Tower. By that time it was crowded with journalists and people. I tried to call Hanan her but she didn't answer her telephone. A bystander told me that she was at the Portobello Rugby Club. I went there and found her there with her siblings, friends and other family members.

41. Everyone was trying to search for Abdulaziz and his family, and hoping someone, even just one of them, was still alive. I still believed Abdulaziz and his family was going to be okay. We kept waiting, but we weren't given any official updates until weeks later, when I heard the family had been told that Abdulaziz and his family had likely passed away, as they had not yet been located. Food and clothing was offered to us – so many things were offered to us – but this was by the community, rather than by RBKC.

42. We spent that night and the following nights at the Premier Inn in Earl's Court, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Someone from RBKC sorted this out. All four of us were put in a single small room in the basement of the hotel, with windows which couldn't be opened. There were 3 beds in the room. It was difficult living in a single room, as we had no privacy at all. We were never offered a second room by RBKC.

43. The four of us lived at Premier Inn until mid-July, when I went to Morocco. I was

Name: Salah Eddine Chebiouni

Date

03/07/2018

allocated a permanent 3 bedroom in Kensington Olympia at the end of August, when I returned from Morocco. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

44. Zak was supposed to take his GCSEs last summer but could not, due to the fire. The school was understanding about this, and he will take his GCSEs this year instead. Zak lives with me in Kensington Olympia now, and [REDACTED] lives with Hanan [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

45. I can't give any details about the Family Liaison Officers the family were allocated as Hanan dealt with them.

Previous statements and interviews

46. I made a statement to the Metropolitan Police on 20 December 2017. I have not given any media interviews.

47. I do not feel able to give evidence to the Inquiry.

I believe that the content of this witness statement is true.

Signed:.....

Dated:.....

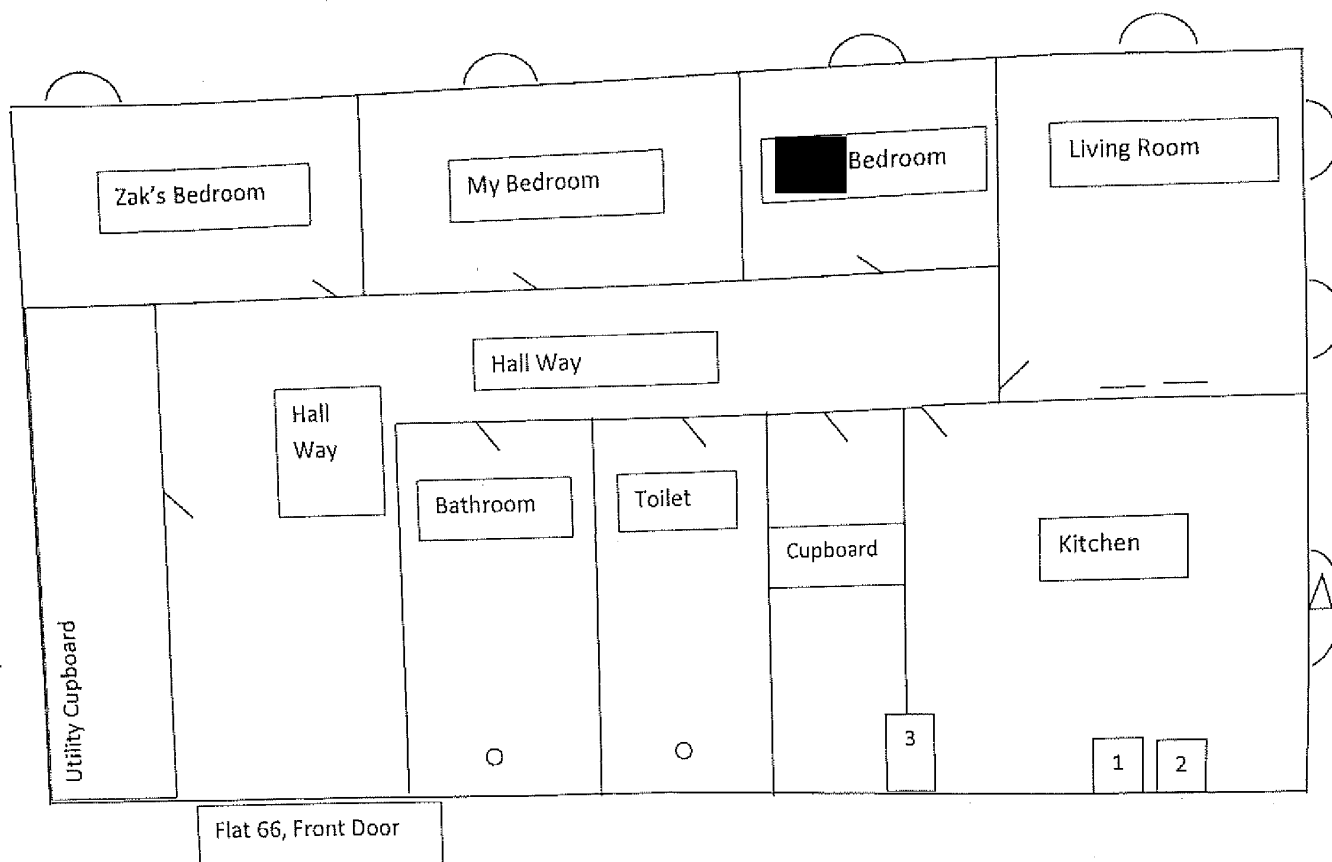
Salah Eddine Chebiouni

Name: Salah Eddine Chebiouni.....

Date.....

APPENDIX I

FLOOR PLAN, SALAH EDDINE CHEBIOUNI, FLAT 66, 9TH FLOOR



- = Window
- = Vent
- = Standard door
- = Double doors
- = Extractor fan (by the window)
- = Washing machine
- = Electric cooker
- = Boiler

Name: Salah Eddine Chebiouni

Date: 03/07/2018