

Witness Statement of: Salma Ismael

No. of statement: 1

Exhibits:

Date of statement: 22/06/18

GRENFELL TOWER PUBLIC INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF SALMA ISMEAL

I, SALMA ISMAEL, will say as follows:

1. This statement is my account of events that took place on 14th June 2017. This statement is for the purpose of Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry. I wish to make a further statement as part of Phase 2 of the Inquiry. I want to make a further statement regarding other matters in Phase 2 of the Inquiry.

Background

2. I live at [REDACTED] Hurstway Walk with my husband, Abdelsalam Suleiman. My date of birth is [REDACTED] I am a Core Participant in the Inquiry.
3. My husband and I have lived on the Lancaster West Estate for about 18 years and have always lived in the flat we are in now. I am a cleaner and I work in West London. I have worked in this position for over ten years. My husband used to be a vehicle driver for the embassy but is now working in an office.

14 June 2017

4. I normally get home from work at around 10.30pm, but on 13 June 2017 I was a bit late home. I got back at 11pm and went to bed. It was Ramadan and so at around 12.30am I woke up and went to pray in my living room. From our living room there is a door which opens onto the balcony, which looks directly out to Grenfell Tower. You can see the Tower from the balcony.

5. While I was praying, I suddenly realised that I could hear police sirens outside and they sounded like they were near to the Tower. I wondered what was going on. I opened the door onto the balcony and I could see that the Grenfell Tower was on fire. I wondered at the time where all the police vehicles were going to go because I knew that there was no space for them to park by the Tower.
6. I went up to the bedroom and woke up my husband to tell him that the Tower was on fire. He told me that he thought the fire would be brought under control, and so he went back to sleep.
7. I still felt concerned, and so I ran out of my flat down to the ramp near Station Walk, very close to Grenfell Tower. I stood by the nursery in the Tower and looked up. I think that this is on the North side of the Tower. The fire did not look like it was spreading upwards, but it looked like it was spreading to the right and going all around the building like a cyclone. I stood there for about five minutes, but then there were lots of police who were telling us to go, so I moved back down Station Walk, away from the Tower.
8. While I was standing by the nursery, I saw four or five people walk out of the Tower safely, with big wheeled suitcases. They came out of the Tower at different times. I would say that two of them looked Filipino, and the other two looked Ethiopian. There were many people exiting the Tower safely, and I think that they were from the 4th, 5th, 6th floors. I don't think that people higher up knew what was happening at first, and they may have still been asleep at this time.
9. I could hear people screaming out of their windows in the Tower. It was like no scream that I've heard before. People were waving and hanging out the window. The police were shouting back up to them: "don't get out, don't get out."
10. I could see black smoke coming from the Tower. I do not remember the smell of the smoke. The sky was black from the smoke.
11. The fire was spreading so quickly, it was really shocking. It was like someone had poured gas on it, it had gone up that fast. I had never seen anything like this before. When I started to see it spread so quickly I knew how serious the fire

was. I knew at this moment that people were going to die. I could see that there was no way out for some people. I got upset thinking about the children inside. I thought about how their lives would be cut short at such a young age. The thought of others having to die with their children and the people they love the most is an awful thought. There were people who I knew who lived in Grenfell Tower, and I thought about them.

12. The 'decoration' on the outside of the Tower was falling off. I could see big bits of plastic and aluminium falling off the building. There were big bits of plastic in the grassy area by the walkway which had fallen off, and small bits of debris on many people's balconies.
13. At some point I moved away from where I was standing on Station Walk and stood on Bramley Road. There were hundreds of people there on Bramley Road. People were just watching in shock. We were told to move back by the police. They started to put tape up and cordon off the area so that people were safe.
14. I went back to my flat to find my husband but he was not there. He had gone outside and was stood by the walkway. I found him there and he told me that the police had come around knocking on doors, telling people to evacuate the building.
15. I called my friend Amina [REDACTED] as me and told her to get out. I wanted her to see what was happening to this building, and I was concerned about her son because he was not well. I managed to go and get her to come out. Later on I tried to find her again, but she wasn't picking up her phone and I thought something had happened to her. I eventually found them sitting down on the stairs outside, shaking and holding each other.
16. I was crying so much. I could hear people shouting for help from the Tower and I could see them in the windows and no one could help them. I could see children at the windows, shouting and waving white cloths. It was horrific. I did not understand how this could happen in England, and in Europe.
17. I could see helicopters above the Tower. I thought that maybe they would get a ladder and bring it down to save the people at the top of the Tower, but they did not. I could not understand why not. I was angry at them for not doing anything.

The police seemed to just be standing and watching. All I could think about was the people that were stuck inside with no one coming to save them. I didn't understand why the firefighters told people to stay in their flats and why they didn't want them to come out. If they told them to come out then at least people had a chance to live.

18. I stayed watching the Tower until about 8am because I couldn't sleep and I wanted to find out what had happened to the people. At one stage I went to Kensington Leisure Centre to watch from there.

19. When I was stood by Kensington Leisure Centre I could see the firemen going inside the Tower with their water hoses, but I can't remember what time this was as I didn't have anything on me to tell me the time. The building was black. I could see the water hoses and they were not high enough to tackle the fire. I could see fire engines when I was at the Leisure Centre, but from our side, by Station Walk, they could not get close enough to the Tower. When I was walking around, I also saw the fire fighters come out of the Tower. They were carrying people out and they were crying. They were clearly overwhelmed and it was really upsetting to see them crying.

Who I knew in the Tower

20. My friend Maryam lived on the 4th floor. She was pregnant at the time of the fire.

We are good friends. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I called her on the night of the fire a few times but she did not answer the phone. I was so worried about her as she was pregnant and her legs were swollen from the pregnancy, so I called a mutual friend and told the friend that the Tower was on fire. My friend then called Maryam's brother and he said that she was safe. I didn't find out until 2pm on 14 June that she was safe.

21. I knew NuraJemal who lived in the Tower with her husband and three children.

They all passed away. I knew her from the area. On 13 June I had seen her around Latimer Road around 4.30pm. She was coming home from picking up the kids from school. Sometimes we would go for coffee together at the coffee shop. She is from Ethiopia. For the first couple of days after the fire, some people said she

was in hospital, while others said she was dead but that her kids were alive. About two or three days after the fire I found out that they had all died.

Aftermath

22. I will never forget the fire and can't stop thinking about it. I was sick for three weeks after the fire. For three days I had a nose bleed. They had medical people in Harrow Club, who gave me spray for my nose. I could not work for a week after the fire. I could not sleep for four days straight. I would walk around the streets looking at the pictures of missing people. It was horrible. My throat feels different since the fire and my friends say I sound different.
23. Every time I shut my eyes I just see the people in the Tower and the fire. Immediately after the fire I had nightmares all the time. My sleep is starting to get a little bit better, but if I think about the building then it all comes back to me.
24. I went back to my flat after the fire but there was no heating, gas or water. I had to go to the Harrow Centre when I needed to take a shower. I stayed living in my flat in these conditions for one month. After this I was placed in a hotel, where I lived for seven months. There was a counsellor at the hotel that I would see. I found it really hard living away from my home in a hotel.
25. There is more I want to say about the community and the aftermath of the fire but I understand that this will be looked at in Phase 2 and I can make a further statement then.

Statement of truth

I believe that the facts stated in this statement are true. I am willing for the statement to form part of the evidence before the Inquiry and published on the Inquiry's web site.

Signed:



Dated: 22/06/2018

Salma Ismael