

**Witness Statement of: Shahnaz Afraseyabi**

**No. of statement: 1**

**Exhibits: 0**

**Date of statement: 26 June 2018**

**GRENFELL TOWER PUBLIC INQUIRY**

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**WITNESS STATEMENT OF SHAHNAZ AFRASEYABI**

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I SHANAZ AFRASEYABI, will say as follows:

1. This statement is my account of events that took place on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017. I make this statement for the purposes of Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry. I may wish to make a further statement as part of Phase 2 of the Inquiry.
2. This statement was made in Farsi and was translated into English by my daughter Solmaz.

Background

3. I was born in Iran and I lived there for many years until I moved to the UK. I live in West London, where I lived on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017. It is about a 5 minute drive to Grenfell Tower from my home. My older sisters Sakeneh Afraseyabi and Fatemeh Afraseyabi both died in Grenfell Tower. I was very close to them - particularly to Sakeneh. Before we moved to the UK, we used to live very near to each other in Iran and we could see each others' houses from our windows. [REDACTED]

Shahnaz Afraseyabi

██████████ I went to live with Sakeneh. Sakeneh's younger children were around the same age as me and Sakeneh became a mother figure to me. Later on in life, once I had children, Sakeneh and Fatemeh helped me to look after them. I was incredibly close with both of my sisters.

4. I find it very difficult to speak about what happened to my sisters on the night of the fire. It is very hard for me to describe what happened.

#### Grenfell Tower

5. Sakeneh lived in Flat 151 on the 18<sup>th</sup> floor of Grenfell Tower. This is on the East side of the building, opposite the Leisure Centre. Sakeneh moved in around a year before the fire. I had been to Grenfell Tower many times. Sakeneh had health problems and she found it difficult to walk. She would have to get the lift up to her flat.
6. Fatemeh lived in Edmonton. She would often stay with us or Sakeneh.

#### 14<sup>th</sup> June

7. On 13<sup>th</sup> June I had spent the day with Sakeneh and Fatemeh. Our cousin, Fariba, had come over ██████████ to visit us for two weeks. She was staying with me at my home. My daughter Solmaz Sattar was also with us on this day. We had lunch together at Sakeneh's flat in Grenfell Tower — and we stayed in the flat for the rest of the day. Fariba, Solmaz and I left the flat at about 9.30pm to 10 pm. Fariba came back with me to my flat and Solmaz went back to her home. Fatemeh stayed with Sakeneh in Flat 151.
8. I received a phone call from a family member in the early hours of the morning telling me that there was a fire at Grenfell Tower. At first I did not believe that it was very serious. I think that this call was made at around 1am. I then shortly after this call received another phone call, this time from my daughter Solmaz. She told me to get to Grenfell Tower straight away. She told me that the fire was real, and that it was serious. I told Fariba that there was a fire at the Tower and we left my flat immediately. I stood in the street and I put my hand out in front of passing cars asking them to stop and take us to Grenfell Tower. A car stopped and we were given a lift by

a stranger towards the Tower, who dropped us off at "Pumpkin Pizza Shop" which was close to the Tower. We then started walking towards the Tower. I got there at around 1:30am.

9. I had thought that Solmaz may have been exaggerating about how serious the fire was but when we arrived I saw the fire on the outside of the Tower and I saw all the fire engines outside parked on the roads. I realised that the fire was serious. I looked up at the Tower and I saw that the fire was spreading high up one of the sides of the building when we arrived. It was travelling up the building. This was at about 1.20am to 1.30am. Fariba and I then ran to the base of Grenfell Tower and met up with Solmaz who was standing there.
10. I tried to get into the Tower. I managed to make my way through a small group of people who were all pushing and shoving each other to get towards the Tower. At the front of the crowd were some police and fire officers. I pleaded with them to let me go into the Tower but they didn't let me in. I could do nothing more but stand there and watch the fire. Much later on, I saw that my arms and legs were covered in bruises. I think these bruises were from me trying to get between the crowd to get into the Tower and trying to get past the police so that I could get to the building and rescue my loved ones. At one point whilst in the crowd, I fell down on the ground.
11. When I first arrived there were not that many people outside but it fairly quickly became very busy. I remember people were putting mattresses out onto the ground around the base of the Tower. I stayed where I was for hours.
12. I stood next to Solmaz who was on the telephone to Fatemeh. She was speaking in Farsi to Fatemeh as Fatemeh was not fluent in English. Solmaz was listening to what Fatemeh had to say and then she would tell the firefighter and police officer standing next to us what was going on in their flat. The officers then gave advice on what to do to Solmaz and she then passed on their advice to Fatemeh in Farsi. I can't remember what the firefighters were saying Fatemeh and Sakeneh should do. Sometimes Solmaz put her phone on speakerphone so I could also hear what Fatemeh was saying

and what was going on in the flat. I can't remember exactly what she said, as there was so much going on at the time. I do remember hearing that Fatemeh and Sakeneh had moved from their flat on the 18<sup>th</sup> floor to another flat, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> floor, where they were with some of Sakeneh's neighbours.

13. We watched the fire getting worse. We stood at the base of the Tower, helpless. I did not know what to do. It was like a movie. I could hear people screaming from the Tower. People around me were crying because they had loved ones in the Tower. I was just crying and I couldn't breathe.
14. I recall seeing women with scarves standing at the windows of flats in the Tower, waving their scarves for attention. I dream of them now and think about them a lot.
15. I saw a woman leave the Tower and being taken to an ambulance. I could tell that she was from [REDACTED]. She was wearing [REDACTED]. I saw her being given a mask to help her breathe. I went over to speak to her when she was in the ambulance and I asked her if she had seen my sisters. The woman could not say anything and was just shaking.
16. As time went on, more people arrived and there was more pushing and shoving by the Tower. The police kept pushing us back, further away from the Tower. I find it very difficult to remember timings throughout the evening because I was so worried about my sisters and shocked about what was going on throughout the night. We went to stand on the East side of the Tower near the Leisure Centre, which is where Flat 151 looked onto.
17. I saw a helicopter in the sky an hour or two after I had arrived. I remember that we all spoke about how we thought it was there to rescue my sisters. I thought it was there to rescue people in the Tower. We all believed at that point that my sisters would be rescued, out of the Tower and out of the fire but that didn't happen. Days after the fire I found out that the helicopter was there to film the fire.

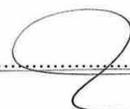
18. Solmaz had been on the phone to Fatemeh virtually the whole time since I had been there. Solmaz told Fatemeh that she was going to put the phone down so that she could get an update from firefighters about what they should do, so she could tell Fatemeh and give her an update on the rescue. Solmaz put the phone down and spoke to some firefighters. However, Fatemeh did not pick up her calls after this point. She didn't pick up any calls after this. We were no longer able to reach her. I think that this was around 3am. At the time I believed that they must have been rescued by the firefighters and my sisters were leaving or had left the Tower.
19. I waited for my sisters to come out of the building, but they didn't come. It was incredibly difficult. I was crying and found it difficult to breathe. I was getting more and more worried about my sisters as time went on and I started to question whether they had in fact been rescued.
20. At some point in the night whilst I was standing there, watching the fire and waiting for Sakineh and Fatemeh to be rescued, I had a panic attack. I vomited twice. I felt so sick watching the fire, seeing what was happening. My whole body was shaking, I lost the strength in my legs. The smell of smoke was so strong. I could smell burning bodies, the smell was all around us. It smelled like dried meat. There was so much fire and heat and smoke. I breathed in a lot of the smoke coming from the Tower that night and I believe that this has now affected my breathing.
21. I stayed there at the base of the Tower until the morning, waiting for my sisters to come out. At around 8am, the fire was still burning. Sakeneh and Fatemeh had not come out.
22. I remember there was a rumour going around amongst the people outside that survivors were in the pub opposite Latimer Road underground station. People were crowding around the pub to get in to find their family and friends. I tried to get in there to see if Fatemeh and Sakineh were there. I tried to pull myself up onto the window of the pub so that I could see in because it was so crowded. When I did this I scraped my forearms, my legs and my knees, and could not get in. I don't know what time this was. I couldn't see them in there.



**Statement of truth**

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

I am willing for the statement to form part of the evidence before the Inquiry and for it to be published on the Inquiry's website.

Signed ..........

Dated ..26/6/2018.....

**Translator declaration**

I, Solmaz Sattar believe that the translation of this witness statement is true, accurate, and correct to the best of my knowledge and ability.

Signed ..........

Dated ..26/06/2018.....

