

Witness statement of: Shukri Ali
Number of statements: 1
Exhibits: 0
Date of statement: 14 May 2018

GRENFELL TOWER PUBLIC INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF SHUKRI ALI

I, **SHUKRI OMAR ALI**, 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

[REDACTED] I moved to Hurstway after the birth of my second child, at the end of October 2012. Prior to this, I was in temporary accommodation.

2. My flat is a two bedroom flat on the ground floor. I lived there with my three children, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
3. When I was first offered the flat, I was still in hospital. The option I had was W11 or Colchester. I didn't want to be outside of London and accepted without viewing it. When I saw it, I was a bit taken aback by it looking like a prison but I saw the inside and was so relieved. It was big and spacious and felt like home almost immediately.
4. I invested a lot of my own money doing the place up. I decorated all the rooms, including the hallway and kids bedrooms. By the end of 2014 both my mum and one of my sisters had moved closer to the area. I had no intentions of ever moving.
5. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] I worked part-time from 9am to 10pm on Saturdays and Sundays. This worked very well for me because it meant that I didn't have to

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spend lots on childcare. It also meant that I could be at home for the children and have a life with them.

Community

6. I got to know my immediate neighbours pretty quickly. It was not like other places I had lived where no one talked to each other; here, everyone was friendly and it was nice being part of such a welcoming community. It was only after a very short while that I knew residents further out, including those from Grenfell Tower to say hello to.
7. My immediate neighbours had children who were of a similar age to mine. They became such close friends that we would share daily tasks - they would collect my children from nursery and I would do shopping. They were people you could really trust. On one occasion, a neighbour sat with my children whilst I had to take one to hospital for a head injury.
8. Residents I did not know to socialise with would say hello in passing and everyone knew everyone, at least by face. We would inadvertently congregate in the playground at the bottom of the Tower or communal areas whilst our children played. Most of the children also went to playgroups or schools together and swimming.

14 June 2017

9. The 13 June was a normal day. I had spent the evening at home whilst the children played inside. I put them to bed around 8pm and relaxed until I went to bed around 12am to 12:15am. I watched television until I dosed off roughly around 45 minutes later. It was a warm night and my windows were wide open.
10. I woke to the sound of screaming women and footsteps from people running. I opened my eyes and in the reflection of the window saw flashing blue lights. I quite often saw emergency services for one reason or another coming from the road, but because of the screaming I thought I should get up and check. My window looked out onto Whitchurch Road.
11. As soon as I looked out I saw a group of women running from Bramley Road, down Whitchurch Road, heading towards Testerton Walk. They were screaming but also saying something in what I think was Moroccan Arabic. I understand Arabic but Moroccan Arabic is different. I think they were saying something about a fire. It was weird for women to be running and screaming without any men with them so I wanted to check everything was ok.

12. My sister was asleep, as were the children. I put a head scarf and shoes on and went outside. It was about 1am and a few neighbours had already congregated on the ramp immediately outside the main entrance to Hurstway Walk. One of my immediate neighbours was already out. I overheard her saying "it's on fire". I didn't know what she was talking about. I looked around and noticed everyone was facing the Tower. I looked over and saw smoke billowing into the sky. It was a dark night but the smoke was much lighter than the sky. It was very thick and just going up. I could smell burning. It was an intense smell and getting stronger. I then saw what appeared to be fire on the East side of the building. I could see it lit up but I couldn't see any flames.
13. As I was looking around, I turned to Whitchurch Road and saw a fire engine trying to reverse. It was facing Bramley Road. I assumed they were trying to access the Tower from Bramley Road but they were unable to because of the gas works that were happening on Bramley Road. . There was a huge hole in the road and I immediately felt angry. I had complained about the roadworks so many times. This was the third time Bramley Road had been dug up and each time it was left closed with no access for ages. It seemed they would just dig it up and then wait for parts. I never understood why they didn't plan what they needed before starting the work. I telephoned and emailed both the council and the contractors carrying out the work before the fire, but nothing was done. The road closure meant that all the buses from Bramley Road had to be rerouted. It also created congestion all along Whitchurch Road and people would be hooting their car horns in the middle of the night because they had been blocked in or were stuck because of other cars. There was barely space for a single car to pass down. In that same week, my wing mirror had been knocked off my car.
14. I went to the bottom of the ramp to see if there was anything I could do. My car was also parked there so I wanted to make sure it didn't need to be moved. As I arrived, there were other neighbours discussing whether someone should help the firemen. The fire engine was reversing at the time and being directed by two other firefighters. Two male residents were also helping them to reverse. There were cars parked on the curb between Testerton Walk and Barandon Walk on the corner of Whitchurch Road, which seemed to be making it more difficult for the fire engine to reverse.
15. I stayed chatting to other residents for about 45 minutes. During this time, the flames had become bigger and the flames had spread to the top of the East façade of the Tower. I remember trying to remain calm and telling myself that it's not a big deal; the fire brigade always kept things under control but the panic of other residents left me feeling shocked and

overwhelmed. In my job, I am trained to deal with emergency situations but it was so different because it was on my doorstep.

16. Around 1:45am, I went back to my flat to check that the children hadn't woken up from all the commotion and to collect my phone. I was starting to think this was going to be a major incident and wanted to forewarn my colleagues.
17. When I returned to the flat, I woke up Fatima and told her about the fire. She was convinced it wasn't going to be a big deal so she agreed to stay with the children. I said I would keep her updated.
18. Five to ten minutes later at around 1:50am to 1:55am, I left home and took the other exit from the walkway onto Latimer Road by the bus stop. I wanted to see what was going on and make sure everything was ok. I saw a neighbour at the bus stop talking to another neighbour. She lived in the 400's on the walkway but knew someone in the Tower. She was trying to call them but there was no answer. Others were trying to get closer to the Tower to try and help but there were police officers pushing people back saying 'no'. I then saw a fire engine mount the curb off Latimer Road trying to get access to the Tower through where the trees are. I saw two firefighters opening the water supply for the hoses on the floor. Two residents were also trying to help. I could still smell the burning but I could not see the flames from where I was standing. The emergency services continued to flood the area and I knew then that this was not like any other fire.
19. A lot of us just wanted to warn residents in the Tower. Residents were panicking and there was a lot of commotion around me. It was even more worrying to see the emergency services being unable to access the Tower. I felt helpless. I stayed around the area for around 20 to 30 minutes before deciding to head back to the ramp outside Hurstway Walk.
20. A few minutes later at around 2:20am, I got back home and woke my sister to let her know how serious this was. By the time I had got home, the sirens had woken my daughter up. She was crying and just wanted to be with me. I was becoming increasingly concerned about the lack of information being relayed from the emergency services. Everything seemed to be coming through via the residents so I wanted to be outside. I also wanted to be outside in case the emergency services needed me to move my car, which was parked on Whitchurch Road. My sister agreed to stay with the children and I took [REDACTED] with me.
21. About 2:30am, I arrived outside and more residents had gathered. The ramp was full of people and others were sitting on the grass and the walls. One elderly neighbour was handing out tea in disposable cups for those who had been outside for some time. So many people were on the

phone to residents in the Tower. They were relaying information to them and telling them where exactly the fire was in relation to their flat. They were all saying to get out but the residents were all saying they were trapped.

22. I was looking at the Tower in complete disbelief. By now the flames had travelled all the way up the East façade of the Tower and were spreading across the top of the South and West façades. I remember smelling a strong burning smell. It was getting stuck in the back of my throat.
23. I saw a lady about three quarters of the way up the South façade waving a white t-shirt in a window. There was another resident in the Tower waving some fairy lights in a window to attract attention. I could hear a little girl inside the Tower screaming “I’m here”. She was saying she couldn’t get out because there was too much smoke and begging for help. Everyone on the ramp was saying how awful it was that we couldn’t help this little, innocent girl. The voice seemed to be trailing towards us.
24. I called work to give them the heads up that this was likely to be a major event. I spoke to one of my colleagues on the front desk but she was quite blasé. I did not know how to relay the gravity of what was going on; I was in shock myself. I asked her to let the nurse in charge know.
25. Around 4am, residents from Testerton Walk began evacuating. They all seemed to be in shock and filtering out like zombies. Someone who lived upstairs in our walkway became hysterical. She had heard through Chinese whispers that there was a risk the gas supply in the Tower would blow up. The gas to all of the walkways was supplied from underneath the Tower so the concern was that all the flats in the walkways were now at risk of an explosion. I tried to stay calm but I remember my heart palpitating so hard and fast. It was like a strong adrenaline rush. I went straight into auto-pilot but my concern remained with the residents of the Tower. I did not consider the effect witnessing this tragedy would have on me.
26. Things started falling off the Tower. One neighbour just starting yelling “Look! Look! There are things falling”. I was in a daze and couldn’t really focus. I just thought it was someone throwing something out of the window to attract attention and let others know they were still there.
27. It was Ramadan and friends and family had woken for their last meal before day break. Details of the fire had hit the news and I started to receive lots of calls. I reassured them I was ok but actually, I don’t think it had fully hit me. It all felt surreal.

28. I took a video at 4:07am and the fire had engulfed the Tower. I couldn't hear the little girl screaming anymore or see the white t-shirt or fairy lights being waved in the windows. Lights within flats just seemed to cut out one by one. I just prayed they had all gotten out safely. The smoke was now dark grey and black. I had never seen it like that. After about 30 minutes the flames settled and the smoke was billowing up in a funnel-like way. Seeing the Tower in this state in daylight heightened my state of shock. The reality hit and I felt overwhelmed with panic. All hope of them saving the residents had faded and I felt sick to my stomach that I was not able to help. I suddenly realised throughout the whole night, I had not heard one fire alarm from the Tower.
29. By about 5am, day was breaking and I decided to take my daughter back home so she could try and get some sleep. I dropped her back to the flat with my sister and went back out. I wanted to be outside to know what was going on. I felt that was the only way I was going to make sure my family and neighbour, who was still asleep next door, were kept safe too.
30. I kept popping back home to check everything was ok. By 8am residents from the walkways started leaving in their cars to stay with friends and families. As I looked around, I could just see the horrific view of the burnt out Tower, residents still hysterical and thick black smoke. The media had arrived and a lot of residents were being asked intrusive questions. I did not want to look like I was being nosey or a gossip so I took a step back.
31. I was also still worried about the gas blowing up so decided to take my sister and children to my mum's house [REDACTED] Unfortunately, we had to pass through the chaos to access my car. I tried to shelter the children but they could see what was happening around them. .
32. I stayed at my mums for around half an hour before deciding to return back. I was working on the night of the London Bridge terrorist attack and thought my skills might be of use to the emergency services who seemed to be low on resources.
33. When I arrived back around 9:30am the Tower and communal gardens looked like a warzone. Around the walkways, it looked like a refugee camp. Residents were still camped out on the grass in pyjamas not knowing what to do. They looked worried, disheveled and shocked. Others were crying hysterically. It was absolute chaos. A few police officers ran down Bramley Road but there was no one around the walkways to help us. The Tower was surrounded in smoke more than earlier. It was an intense burning smell and with every gust of wind, I would cough as it stuck in the back of my throat and caught my breath.

34. I stood outside with other residents just trying to get our head around what had happened and what we were supposed to be doing. We saw people from the office blocks wheeling big cages of water to the churches for residents. There were also charities delivering water, drinks and blankets down Bramley Road. Later on in the morning, a rumour started to circulate that the police were evacuating the walkways. A short while later, the police started filtering through to the walkways.
35. I decided to go back home and get things prepared just in case. I was still in a state of shock and although I knew this was a major incident, I kept thinking things would be ok in a couple of days so only packed a few bits. Around midday, the police knocked on my door. They asked how many people lived in the property and asked a few other questions, almost like an inventory. They said I should be ready to evacuate just in case. I asked them a few questions about our safety in the walkways but they couldn't answer them.
36. I finished packing and went back outside. There was still no clear information being fed through to the walkway residents. I did not know if there the Tower was going to collapse or if there was going to be a gas explosion or if we were safe. The police had almost gone from our area and there was no one there with authority who was willing or able to help us. We had not been told to evacuate as of yet but I did not think it was safe to bring the children back home. However, I wanted to be home just in case the police came around with information or needed access to my flat to switch off the gas. I did not know that the shelters were for walkway residents too; I assumed they were only for those in the Tower so I dropped some clothes for the children to my mums and came back home.

Aftermath

37. When I got home, there was no hot water in the flat. I had to spend the next few days back and forth to my mum's to shower. I was in survival mode and living off takeaways. I had bought a few bits to tide me over and thought, whilst I was there, I would buy some things to donate to others. A few days later, a neighbour took pictures of the services available to those in the walkways and circulated it. I was surprised to know that I was able to access the Westway sports centre to shower but also I was quite upset that the council had left us to find information for ourselves.
38. Police officers were extending the cordoned areas and access to my flat was becoming increasingly more difficult.

39. My daughter had thought that the fire had happened in the day because it was daylight when she saw the Tower. She kept thinking it had happened at nursery and kept asking about her friends. My other two children then started asking questions and all three of them became extremely inquisitive. Despite my reassurances, they were scared and refused to go back to the area.
40. It was overcrowded at my mum's and I knew now at this point that this stay was likely to be more long term. I spoke with other walkway residents who told me that we were entitled to temporary accommodation because of our situation. I was frustrated that the council had not relayed this information to me so I telephoned them but my call was put through to a call centre outside of the borough. They were asking inappropriate questions about my immigration status and whether I was actually British. I felt so annoyed but had to answer to get access to some sort of accommodation.
41. Around the start of July 2017, I was placed in a hotel in Paddington. However, when we arrived, my sister and I were separated and the children divided between us. Our rooms were so far from each other. The children were still very affected by the fire and were not sleeping well. I asked to have two rooms next door or closer to each other but was told it wasn't possible. I contacted the council but they said there was nothing more they could do.
42. The hotel was situated next to St Mary's Hospital and the train station. The sirens from the hospital and the vibrations from the train track were triggering regular distress and night terrors to my daughter. She would wake up screaming. This got worse and every time she heard a siren she would run to the door and try to get out. She wouldn't settle and she became very clingy. The sirens then started to trigger flashbacks for me too. There were also no catering facilities in the hotel so we had to walk a few streets down for food. It was all becoming too much so I contacted the council who said there was nothing else available.
43. I spoke with a friend who told me she had been placed in a different hotel which sounded like it would suit us better. I tried to call the council for three days but I kept being fobbed off by them. They told me that it was 'peak season' and nothing was available. I ended up calling the hotel directly and I was able to reserve two rooms on my bank card. I contacted the council to tell them and they later arranged to pay for this.
44. During this time, I was on auto-pilot to try and comfort my children. I felt so distant from myself. The media were covering the fire so frequently and it just felt like every time I switched on the television, I was reliving the horrors of that night. I felt like it was all still happening and I just burst into tears every time I thought about it. Even if my daughter was

resting, I could not sleep. My two youngest became more and more inquisitive. They started asking really morbid questions like “did all my friends die?” They kept asking why we couldn’t go back home.

45. Since the fire, the council has offered the support of social services and key workers. They have been of no help and seem only to advocate for the council, not us. However, Shelter, who visited the hotel to offer support to residents, are now helping me with my housing issue. They also found support for the children and a psychotherapist for me.
46. Day to day I am struggling. My mental health has deteriorated and I have been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and am suffering from panic attacks and anxiety. I still have nightmares about the night of the fire and the little girl’s screams trailing towards me. I can still smell the fire. It’s harrowing.
47. The impact of the media hounding my neighbours and constantly taking photographs has given me heightened anxiety. They are always hovering around and seem to have lost sight of and respect for what has happened.
48. The council is also saying that I do not fall under the wider Grenfell Tower residents and will not be given priority so there is the possibility that I will be rehoused outside of the borough.
49. My children are struggling emotionally. They have all lost friends who died in the fire. Two of my children have been diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder. All three children are constantly asking when they can go home because even though the fire still haunts us, Hurstway was always home and we miss our community. Prior to the fire, my children were being temporarily home schooled. Living in a hotel, with no future security, makes the decision of them returning to school and, if so where, so much more difficult.

Statement of truth

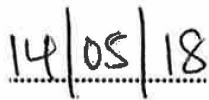
I confirm that this statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

I confirm that I am willing for the statement to form part of the evidence before the Inquiry and published on the Inquiry's web site.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shukri Ali', written over a dotted line.

Dated:

A handwritten date '14/05/18' in black ink, written over a dotted line.