

Witness Statement of: Susan Al-Safadi

No. of statement: 1

Exhibits: 7

Date of statement: 5 June 2018

GRENFELL TOWER PUBLIC INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF SUSAN AL-SAFADI

I, SUSAN AL-SAFADI, will say as follows:

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

Background

2. I am a Core Participant to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. My date of birth is [REDACTED]. I make this statement to be used as evidence at the Inquiry.
3. I have lived in Testerton Walk on Lancaster West Estate since I was five years old, when my family moved to the flat in September 1997. We lived in the Earl's Court area before moving here. I went to Avondale Park Primary School and then Holland Park School and know the community well. There is a lot that I would want to say about the history and wider background issues but for now will limit my comments to the night of the fire. I understand that the Inquiry will be dealing with the aftermath and wider issues at a later stage and I will comment then.
4. Our flat is in the 400 numbers on Testerton Walk. There are three levels of split-level flats in Testerton Walk and ours is on the top level. I live with my mother, Eman

Hijazi, my step-dad, Mahmoud Badr, and my little brother, [REDACTED] who is six years old. My older sister, Rawan, lives with us half the time and half the time at her own place.

5. I have a Degree in Medical Genetics and am a Contracts Manager for a Phase 1 Clinical Research Organisation.
6. I loved growing up in the area. I never realised that I was living in social housing; it was never an issue for me. Before the fire, I was not very involved in the community – I didn't even know that there was a Residents' Association ("RA") although since the fire, I was elected by residents onto the RA. I was voted in as the Secretary in September 2017.

14th June

7. I was at home asleep on the night of the fire. I did not hear anything until just before 1.30am. When I was in bed, I was woken up by general voices and shouting coming from outside. I got out of bed and looked out of my bedroom window, which looks out onto the green between Testerton Walk and Barandon Walk. I could not see anything from my window. I could hear people shouting "fire!" so I woke up my mum and step-dad and I went upstairs to the sitting room to get a better viewpoint of the green. I still couldn't see anything so went back downstairs to ask them if they could see anything. We looked outside the window but, again, could not see anything. At this point, my step-dad got a phone call from his nephew who lives across the road from Latimer Road station, asking if we were ok and whether we could see the fire.
8. Attached to our sitting room is a balcony that looks onto the green between Testerton Walk and Barandon Walk. We went outside onto the balcony. It was only when we were standing on the balcony that we could see Grenfell Tower because it is at a perpendicular angle to our windows.
9. At this point, we could see some light and smoke and could hear fire alarms and sirens so we thought the situation was under control. Within half an hour, we could see only a tiny flame on the top right hand side of the Tower as we looked straight

towards the Tower. I would describe it as the corner closest to Barandon Walk (marked on **Exhibit SA-S/1**). I saw people in their windows shouting for help. I could see the electric lights in the Tower flickering on and off. In the lower floors, I saw people tying bed sheets together to try and escape, but I did not understand why. To me, it looked as though it was a tiny, localised fire because I could only see the top right hand corner was alight. I could see that smoke was coming from behind the building, but little did we know that at this point the other side of the Tower was engulfed in fire.

10. I could hear sirens and helicopters so I knew that I did not have to call the emergency services. I am not sure whether I could see any fire engines at this point. I did not see any police at this point, but this may have been because our view from the balcony was obscured by the trees.
11. At just after 2.15am, I got a phone call from a friend who lives in Ladbroke Grove. She asked if I could see the fire and I asked whether she could. She asked 'are you ok? Have you been evacuated?' I told her 'no' and she said that our neighbour, her friend, who lives on the ground floor of Testerton Walk, had been told to evacuate. She said that she thought we should get out – I said ok.
12. I told my mum and step-dad what my friend had said. We decided that if they knew about the fire in Ladbroke Grove and if our neighbour had been told to get out then we should get out but I still didn't understand why or how they could see the fire that far away.
13. We were still standing on our balcony looking at the Tower. There seemed to be a sudden blunt change where all the lights, instead of flickering, just turned off and didn't come back on again. People stopped coming to the window and shouting for help. This was very eerie. This would have been at about 2.23am. I know this because I took some photographs on my phone at this time. These photographs are exhibited to my statement from **Exhibits SA-S/2-5**.

14. I went downstairs and got dressed in five to ten minutes. We woke my brother [REDACTED] up. My older sister Rawan was not in the flat on that evening.
15. My mum, step-dad and brother all headed downstairs. I stayed behind to knock on our neighbours' doors. I knew no one had knocked on our doors to evacuate us, as [REDACTED] had not woken up until we took him downstairs. There are six flats in our 'hub' on the second floor where our flat is. I did not knock on one neighbour's door because I knew that he had recently passed away. I knocked on the other four doors and two of them answered. I told them there was a fire in Grenfell Tower and we had to leave the building. I then headed downstairs and outside to meet my mum, step-dad and [REDACTED]
16. I went down the ramp that leads from Testerton Walk to Whitchurch Road. There were lots of people gathered outside. I did not see any fire engines, fire fighters or police at this point. The trees were very green given the time of year so you could barely see through the leaves to see the Tower. All I could tell was that there was a lot of light as I could see the light reflecting off the windows of Hurstway Walk.
17. My mum, step-dad, [REDACTED] and I sat on a bench on the estate ramps by Whitchurch Road for a while. We could not see many emergency vehicles from there, at this time. The corner of Whitchurch Road and Bramley Road had already been closed off for some time, about 2-3 weeks, because of gas works and access to the area is generally terrible since the roads are so narrow, so I think they couldn't get down there.
18. At one point my step-dad and I walked to the green between Barandon Walk and Testerton Walk to see what was happening. We got to about half way along the green towards the Tower and stood there for a few minutes. I could not see any fire fighters or policemen on this side of the Tower. This was the first time that I saw the fire properly. At this point, the entire face of the Tower was engulfed in flames. Although there were trees between us and the Tower, through the trees you could see that everything was engulfed in flames. From here I could hear noises; I wouldn't describe them as explosions - but it was like things were giving way. There were crackling noises as you would usually hear from a fire, and sounds of things falling. I could see red hot flames – some were spark like, others seemed like there were streams of liquid flames. There was debris falling everywhere, which was also alight. In hindsight, this

debris was the cladding, but I didn't know that at the time. I would describe it as looking like pieces of Styrofoam or burning paper floating through the air.

19. It was about 3.25am. I know what time this was because I have videos that I took on my phone with that timestamp.
20. The Tower really looked as though it was leaning towards us. It looked like it was going to collapse onto the green from the sheer heat. I was afraid it would fall. The green was eerily quiet at this time.
21. I had no idea that there were still people in the Tower. Unlike earlier, I couldn't hear anyone inside the Tower. I walked back to the bench on Whitchurch Road, just opposite the school, and we stayed put for a few hours. Whilst we were sitting on the bench, we were getting messages from people asking if we were ok. We saw reports on Sky News and it was then I knew that it was bigger than I had thought. I still did not realise that people were still inside. We had just stayed on this side of the Estate and seeing the reflection of the fire in the windows of Hurstway Walk, together with the sun rising, it seemed as though the fire was subsiding and things were now under control. I think this was only because there was no longer such a stark contrast between the fire and the night sky.
22. After a couple of hours of being outside, we saw some officials walking into Testerton Walk officially evacuating people. Before that, residents had been going back and forth into their flats. But after that, there was only restricted access for people who needed to get their medications. We also saw officials walking around with large sledgehammers, presumably to tear down the bollards that would have been blocking vehicular access to the Tower on Bramley Road.
23. From the bench, we saw policeman walking around as it got lighter and we saw some firemen – or at least I think they were firemen – holding what I can only assume were oxygen canisters.
24. I still thought that we would just be outside for a few hours and then we would be allowed back home once the fire was under control.

25. At one point, I walked around to Bramley Road, to just before Latimer Road station. Bramley Road was full of ambulances and fire engines. When I got to Latimer Road station, I saw a lot of people gathered there. Access to the Tower was cordoned off and there was debris falling everywhere. The debris was like when someone smokes around you and little flakes come off the cigarette, although the flakes were much bigger than those you get from a cigarette. It reminded me exactly of the final scene from the film 'Remember Me', which was depicting the 9/11 tragedy.
26. I think this is when I realised that we would not be able to go back in to the flat. This is when I had seen the situation on Bramley Road and all the people outside Latimer Road station.
27. I also started to realise that people may have lost their lives in the fire. I recall hearing Nadia Choucair, my brother [REDACTED]'s Teaching Assistant, being named as a missing person. People were saying that she lived in the Tower and were asking if anyone had heard from her.
28. I remember some young men from the community began handing out bottles of drinking water to those of us outside.
29. At about 6am, it was getting quite cold. Much earlier than this, my step-dad had already decided to go back to his car, which was parked on Bramley Road, to sleep as he had decided he was going to go to work that day. At about 6am, my mum, brother and I all went to my car. The previous evening, I had happened to park my car much further away than I usually would, near Avondale Park Primary School. We headed to the car and tried to sleep. We could see people gathering in the local centres such as St Clement's & St. James' Church. Walking through the streets illustrated the true impact of the fire was much larger than I had understood at the time.
30. At 6.52am, (I know this because I have photographs I took on my phone at this time, which are exhibited to my statement at **Exhibits SA-S/6-7**), we could see some flames inside the Tower, but it looked as though it was over at this point. My mum and my brother decided to go to my sister's flat and I decided to drive to work. Although there

were fire engines parked all the way along Grenfell Road and onto Sirdar Road, the last one was where my car was parked so I was able to drive away. I did see that there was a fire engine from somewhere quite far away, which was Peckham, so I knew that there must be lots of fire engines present. I did later read on Sky News that there were 40 engines at the scene; I remember thinking that I didn't know where these engines would have fit, considering the roads are all very narrow. I certainly saw fire engines on Whitchurch Road, Treadgold Street, Grenfell Road, Bramley Road and St. Ann's Road.

31. During the day at work, I saw articles about missing people. I started to realise that it was serious and knew that many people may have lost their lives. Before, when we had been sitting on the bench I had seen a lot of people that I knew (from the walkways, not the Tower) and so hadn't had this realisation. I hadn't been standing near any of the treatment or triage zones.
32. I was very much still thinking at this point that the building was not stable and could collapse. I left work at about 3.30pm. My mum and brother were at my sister's flat but they had been in contact with our neighbours who said that we still could not go back into Testerton Walk. I decided that I would go back to see if they would let me in to get some medication for myself, as well as my brother's inhalers. The journey from my work back to the estate took much longer than usual, about 2 hours for a 20-minute drive.
33. At the Royal Crescent roundabout in Shepherd's Bush, police were not letting people through with cars. I pulled my window down and explained to them that I lived in one of the buildings near to the Tower and that I had to go back to get some medication. They let me through. I parked on Freston Road and walked over. There were still people outside and some of my neighbours told me that we could not go inside unless we were getting medication.
34. When I arrived at the door to go in, there was a policeman there. I told him that I needed to get my medication. He questioned me and asked me if I could live without it and asked what it was for, which I told him. I explained that I also needed to get my brother's inhalers but that I didn't know where they would be and would have to look

for them. I didn't know where they were as he no longer uses them as often as he used to, but my mum was concerned for his breathing given the smoke earlier that day. The policeman told me that I would have to wait for his colleague to arrive, who would escort me to the flat. When his colleague arrived, he waited at the bottom of the stairs whilst I went up to the flat. I grabbed my bag, my medication, a change of clothes for each of my family members and my brother's inhalers. I heard the policeman call up from the stairs to say that I had to leave, so I left the flat and locked the door. I went downstairs and left the area almost immediately.

35. I drove to my sister's place in Bromley. We were in contact with our neighbours and at about 9 or 10pm on that night, when some of our neighbours told us that we could go back inside our flat. My mum asked if we should go back home. It was not easy fitting us all in my sister's two-bedroom place, however we decided against driving the long distance back and spent the night there.

36. The next day, my step-dad and I went to work and my mum stayed with [REDACTED] at my sister's place. During the day, I received an update from my mum to say that we could go back. This was in the afternoon of the 15th June. We were told that there were still police around, but we were allowed to go back. When my mum arrived, she realised that there was no hot water and heating in our flat.

37. I got back to the flat in the evening, after 10.30pm. There were still policemen around – I asked them 'are we allowed back in? Is it safe to be here?' They said that it was, and they 'wouldn't let us back in if they didn't think it was safe for us to be there'. This was difficult to believe as the police presence was so high, and unsettling to see.

38. For two weeks, there were policemen all around the estate, at all times of the day and night. There were some days when we were evacuated for a few hours at a time, but they were all false alarms due to the Tower moving and setting off the motion sensors. On one occasion, there was an actual fire in a Testerton Walk flat that was put out. There was also an incident of arson, where someone had set a bicycle on fire on the green between Testerton Walk and Hurstway Walk. We have been at home ever since.

Aftermath

39. I got sent a video that a neighbour had taken. It's a video of the Walkway and there is a wrapped corpse lying on the ground in our building. You can't see who the person is as the body is lying in a body-bag. I now understand from other residents that they kept bodies in the corridor of Testerton Walk. This was the most unsettling thing to see. The body in the video is completely unaccompanied; it is just strewn on the floor. I raised the issue of why bodies were being kept on the floor in Testerton Walk with a representative of GOLD command, just after the fire and it was implied to me that this was a fake video, but it is clear that this video was taken in one of the walkways and I believe that the video is real. .
40. As photographs of the missing people started to appear, I did recognise some people that I had gone to school with – but no one that I was still in contact with. Other than those familiar faces, I did not lose anyone in the Tower.
41. I am aware that my brother [REDACTED]'s Teaching Assistant at School, Nadia, died, as well as her family. She worked at Avondale Park Primary School. There were reports of her being missing very early on – I heard her name mentioned before 6am. People were saying that she lived in the Tower but I thought it was hearsay at the time.
42. I don't want to go into detail about the impact of the fire but I will say that my whole life has changed as a result of the fire. I am now an active member of the community. Waking up and seeing the Tower every day has had an impact. I am more aware of fire safety. As cliché as it sounds, not a day goes by where I don't think about what has happened.
43. The whole community has changed. There has been a shift. There is still underlying anger and upset – but it has moved towards a search for dignity and justice, particularly for those who were campaigning before the fire. The community has pulled together.
44. We didn't have hot water or heating in the flat until 4th July 2017. We have not had any gas since 1st August 2017. The boiler broke last Saturday and it caused chaos

among the community. Many people saw steam billowing out of the boiler and that triggered some people.

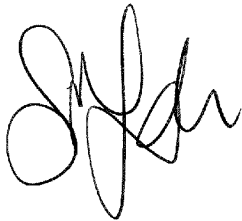
45. I confirm that I have other photographs and videos that I took on the night of the fire, and I can provide these to the Inquiry upon request.

Statement of truth

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

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

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan Al-Safadi', written over a large, faint circular watermark.

Dated:

05 June 2018