

Witness Statement of: Virginia Sang

No. of statement: 1

Exhibits:

Date of statement: 27 June 2018

GRENFELL TOWER PUBLIC INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF VIRGINIA SANG

I, VIRGINIA SANG, 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. My date of birth is [REDACTED] I live at [REDACTED] Hurstway Walk. I live here on my own and I have been living here for 40 years.
3. I work as a GP receptionist, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] and I have been working at the GP surgery for over 20 years. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] I believe I would see the Tower every time I went to work.
4. My flat is on the second floor. It is a two-bedroom maisonette of which the top and bottom floor overlook Bramley Road and from the kitchen and sitting room, it looks onto the Tower.

Community

5. My daughter Tanya Power and my grandson live on [REDACTED]

6. It felt like I knew everyone as many people had moved down from Faraday Road to the estate. I knew a lot of people through my work at the GP surgery as well. I knew quite a lot of people who lived in Grenfell Tower. The people I knew liked living in the Tower, but they didn't like it when the refurbishment happened and they told me about this.
7. Most of the people I knew lived on the top floors from the 15th floor upwards and I knew them personally and professionally and their kids, I watched some of them being born. I saw them grow up.
8. It was a very close knit community on the Lancaster West side of the estate and everyone knew everyone, especially because lots of people had some of the family split between living in the Tower and the Walkways. It was like we all knew each other.
9. We do a lot of things as an estate. I used to be on the Estates Management Board which meant that I put on fun days including barbecues for the kids and we all loved doing this plus I worked in the surgery and through that, I built up a relationship with a lot of people as well.

The TMO

10. There is a lot I want to say about the TMO but I understand that this is going to be dealt with in Phase 2 of the Inquiry and so I will talk about this in a further statement as part of Phase 2.

Fire procedures and safety awareness

11. There was no fire procedure for the building I lived in and I don't remember there ever being a fire drill. It is only since the fire that fire notices have gone up on the walls of the building I live in.

12. I have smoke alarms in my flat. There are three in total but these are really sensitive, and they always go off when I am cooking. There are no fire alarms in main entranceways or in the communal areas.
13. A lot of people I knew who lived in Grenfell Tower were worried about fire safety. This was because there had been lots of electrical surges in the Tower and things like computers would blow out. I heard from residents that they were always telling the TMO about the problems and the TMO would pay for broken equipment but provide no adequate answer as to the reason why it had happened.
14. I know all the flats in the Tower had boilers near the front door too, with pipes running from them after the refurbishment. No-one I knew wanted the cladding. The Estates Management Board had voiced our opinions, and we didn't want the cladding on our building. Originally, we had chosen a different type of cladding for the Tower and there had been various meetings with the TMO where residents asked information about the cladding and they chose cladding that was non-flammable one. However, that wasn't the stuff that went on the Tower. The EMB didn't want the Tower to have the cladding and the council made it difficult for the EMB. The council then had the EMB dissolved as they kept saying that we needed 7 people to make a quorum, but when we reached 7 they kept making it difficult to make it operate.
15. There were so many problems but the TMO just didn't listen at all to the residents in the Tower. After the EMB was dissolved, they just went ahead and did things and then they would only tell us what afterwards.
16. After the refurbishment to the Tower, I would hear from others that there was still a lot of complaining about the cladding from the residents in the Tower, and there were a lot of problems within the flats.
17. Two other exits to the Tower were removed when it had its refurbishment – one exit where you could come from the first floor into the walkway onto Grenfell Walk or you could take stairs to the bottom of the Tower too but now, for the whole Tower, there was just one entrance. There was one way in and one way out.

18. In the past, I knew of there being four other fires in the Tower. One I recall was a year before the building had the cladding put on and that was contained within the flat where the fire started. I think the fire was on the 6th or 7th floor.

14th June 2017

19. On 13th June, I went to the gym after work. This was at [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] We had water workouts at 8pm at the gym. Some people I knew from the Tower were there. On a Wednesday it's "ladies only" at the gym and I was there with friends from the area having a laugh.

20. I left the leisure centre at 9pm and I walked down to the Tower with my friends and they then went home for the night. I was with friends who lived in the Tower and they didn't survive. I can't go into detail about who they were right now; it is too difficult for me.

21. I went home and changed into my nightclothes. I wake up for work at 6:30am and so I went to bed. I was woken up to my phone ringing at 12:40am. It was my neighbour saying that there was a fire at Grenfell Tower. I heard lots of commotion outside my flat, but I didn't really pay any attention to it at the time.

22. I got out of bed and I turned the TV on and watched the news. It was Sky News and I saw the fire in its earlier, small stage but by the time I came outside, it had spread.

23. My neighbour called me on my phone and she told me to get out of the flat, so I put on my dressing gown, I turned around to pick up my phone and cigarettes, and I left. I know now that the estate had been evacuated except the 500 numbers. My daughter phoned me and said to get out. I didn't feel I was particularly in danger, but I didn't know what was going to happen so thought it best to get out.

24. I came outside of the building, at the front and onto Bramley Road, and then I walked to Station Walk to walk to the Tower because a lot of people seemed to be outside and I wanted to see what was happening.

25. There were many residents standing around watching the fire. Many were screaming trying to get people to help and a lot of us were in shock like I was.
26. At first, when I got outside there were no police officers, and there was no-one there to tell us what to do. People were just standing outside watching. I then saw police officers and they realised there were two ways to get to Grenfell Tower. Some police officers did come up to us residents and they tried to stop us from going down where the Tower was. There were about four police officers in total around the area we were at.
27. I wanted to get to the Tower because I saw people running up from the Tower and wanted to go down and help them, the ones who got out from lower floors I mean, and I wanted to bring them to where it was safer. I didn't have anyone's numbers so didn't contact anyone I knew in the Tower.
28. I could see the Tower as I was standing by Station Walk where you walk down from Latimer Road Station and the fire looked like quite a big blaze by this point. The flames were on the left hand side by the side of the Aldridge school and it was going up there. At first it looked like it was an ordinary fire, then there was a lot more smoke and you could see the glow of the fire through the smoke at between 2am and 3am. I could see flames erupting up and then diagonally. I remember that at some point I saw the flames on the Tower were blue.
29. The fire started small and it covered the 9th floor, but in about 5 minutes it had spread. It just felt so surreal. It felt like I was in a dream and that I was going to wake up any minute.
30. I also remember at between 2am and 3am, there was an explosion in the Tower which I believe came from the naked gas pipe which I heard ran down the stairwell in the Tower. I saw a blue flame and someone standing next to me said "look, that's the gas pipe".
31. I was just standing outside watching. My daughter came and stood with me and watched what was happening. She left me at 4am, but before she left, she phoned one

of her work colleagues to tell him to open up the youth club as there were such a lot of people and kids outside.

32. We were all still trying to get forward to help people running who were running out. These were the residents who were from the lower floors of the Tower who had managed to get outside. The police however, were telling us to stay back away from the Tower. We helped some residents who made it out alive from the Tower and took them aside to a tree and threw water on them because their clothes were smoky. One of the men was asking for us to throw water over him. I could see all the smoke coming from them. They were having difficulty breathing. One man was Somalian or Ethiopian and there was a young girl. I am not sure of her description.
33. I saw a man and a child, who was aged seven or eight years old, and they were sitting by the tree. The man was having difficulty breathing so we put him down on the ground to help him, but the police came and they put a blue canvas around him. He was in his early to mid 30's. I knew that wasn't good and I think he died. .
34. I could only see the one side of the Tower from where I was standing on Station Walk. I couldn't see the rest of the sides of the Tower. I turned around to say something to someone who was just standing there, I can't remember who they were but then all these things started flying around in the air. Some of them were quite big; they were bits of fire, bits of burnt material dropping off the building. I wasn't injured from this.
35. I couldn't believe what was happening. There were no firemen on our side but there were police. The street was packed full of people from the area. The police had evacuated blocks 300 and 400 only from Hurstway Walk, but not block 500. The police had evacuated all of Barandon Walk and Testerton Walk. They evacuated these because they are closer to Grenfell Tower.
36. The media turned up and there was a helicopter in the sky. I was there quite a while – I heard this at the beginning before my neighbour rang me. The helicopter didn't help as it was circling over the Tower. It was going around and I am sure that it created a breeze which seemed to me to be making the fire worse.

37. Everyone was stood along Station Walk and I saw some of the police and firemen were carrying victims up the road and we were helping to give them water.
38. People around me were all in shock. I couldn't believe what I was seeing, I thought it wasn't real, I was also in shock. I couldn't believe what I was watching. I saw people in the Tower; some were using flashlights on their phones to alert people that they were there.
39. The smoke was really thick and throughout the night I would watch the windows that people were standing in until I just couldn't see them anymore. I was praying that help had reached them.
40. There were loads of firemen at the Tower but mostly at the back as that was only way they could get to the fire. They were coming down Grenfell Road and Lancaster Road to where the Kensington Aldridge School is.
41. At the end of our road, there was a gas leak, which was there by Whitchurch Road by the end of the flat. It was very narrow anyway and the fire brigades couldn't get around there. For six weeks prior to the fire it was blocked off, it was just left and hadn't been finished and it meant the fire brigade had to go all the way around just to get onto Treadgold Street.
42. I stayed in the same place in Station Walk and I stayed there all night until 6am. At 6am I went back home and then I got ready for work to open up the surgery. I went back to work as I needed to open up. I had the key and also, I did think people may need somewhere to go so I just opened up early.
43. At first, we couldn't open the surgery as we were cordoned off because my workplace is very close to the Tower. [REDACTED] I waited until other staff had come into the surgery. I then went looking outside to see if I could find any patients who were residents in the Tower. We couldn't do any work as the surgery was cordoned off and no-one was allowed in, so I went around looking to see if I could find any survivors because I knew them personally and some of them were also patients at the surgery.

44. I know that my daughter took people who were evacuated from the Walkways to the local youth club as the majority of people were out on the street but inside they had tea and biscuits. It was one of the first places that opened up for the residents.

Aftermath

45. I have friends who died in the Tower. I don't wish to discuss that at this time.

46. I have a few friends who are survivors, but I think there are more people that died that night than the authorities realise, because the council wasn't aware of how many people were even in the Tower. This estate is so badly overcrowded, and they don't know how many people lived in each of the flats.

47. At first, I worked about two and a half days non-stop at the GP surgery, helping people affected by the fire. Then it just all got to me. I had to take some time off work but then I used that time off to still help to sort the donations coming into the Harrow Club. People were dropping off clothes and food, drinks and sorting the clothes into piles for adults, children etc. I was volunteering there to help people affected by the fire.

48. I went to my GP and I was referred to a therapist.

49. It was difficult for me because I had to deal with what happened myself, and then I would go to work and see many people who were affected all over again. There wasn't much escape for me.

50. After the fire I would see the Tower every day. I wasn't offered anywhere to be moved to and at first, after the fire there was no hot water and no heating because the Tower supplied the gas to the Walkways. The water system and heating system from at the base of the Tower and all our supplies were turned off for over three weeks. The only thing we were told was that we could go to Kensington Leisure Centre, Westway Sports Centre or to Virgin to have a shower. I couldn't cook so I had to use my own money to buy food. It was more added expense than we needed. It was a really difficult time for me and it had a big impact on my life.

51. My daughter was put up in a hotel but has been back in her house since January in

[REDACTED]

52. The council rang me two weeks after the fire, but they just wanted to find out how many people there were in each flat in the Walkways. Aside from this, I hadn't heard from the council at all.

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:



Dated:

27/6/18