

## GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

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### FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF VIVIANA RULLO

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I, Viviana Rullo of [REDACTED] Barandon Walk London W11 [REDACTED] will say as follows:

#### Background

1. I am the leaseholder of the above property and live there with my partner David O'Connell. I work as a post-production producer. David works as a Web Developer. The lease is a 125 year lease from 13 June 1988. I am the third owner of this flat under that lease. I bought it on 21 July 2006, and I have lived here for 11½ years. The flat is on the first floor of Barandon Walk and can be seen on **Exhibit VR/1 as figure 1**. When I bought the flat, the lease came with an original map of Lancaster West Estate which I enclose as **Exhibit VR/2**.
2. From our bedroom window, the southern façade and south eastern corner of Grenfell Tower can be seen directly outside, to the right. We have an open plan kitchen/living room. The tower can also be seen from our kitchen/living room window and from our balcony. I enclose as **Exhibit VR/3** a photograph taken of the tower from our living room on 14 March 2018.

#### Night of the fire

3. 13 June was a Tuesday night. David and I were home that evening. I probably got home around 7.30/8pm, and David got in at around the same time. We cooked dinner, watched some television and then went to bed. I usually go to bed around 10.30pm. David usually goes to bed after Newsnight finishes, at around 11.15pm. Once he gets into bed, he is out like a light. Our bedroom window is a sliding glass pane. On that night, it was open a crack, around 6 inches, as it was a hot night and so that our cats could go in and out. The curtains were drawn.

4. I remember waking up in the night to the sound of children screaming "Help me, save me!" The screams were high pitched and may have been coming from women as well. David was asleep in bed. I jumped up, and went into the kitchen to look through that window, because I did not want to wake David up by opening the curtains.
5. I looked outside and saw orange flames on the tower. The flames looked like they started about half way up the tower. At the time I assumed that it was the south eastern corner which was on fire i.e. the one closest to me. However I now know that the fire travelled up the north eastern corner, and that the fire did not travel down the south eastern corner or southern façade until much later in the evening.
6. I screamed at David "the fucking tower's on fire". I had thought that this was around 12.15 as I remember seeing the time on the digital clock on the oven but I am now aware that the fire started in Flat 16 on the East Side of the Tower at just before 1.00am and spread to the South side much later so it must have been later than that.
7. David came into the living room and we both went out on the balcony together to watch. I am not sure how long we stood there for. He said 'get dressed, get dressed properly'. By this he meant to put on outdoor clothes. We dressed, I grabbed my phone and keys, and we left the flat. I was really scared. When I looked at the fire, I remember saying to David , "this is the end times". The fire felt very close to our flat.
8. We left Barandon Walk through the main entrance shown on **Exhibit VR/1 as Figure 2**. We went down the walkway and out down to the bottom of the garden which is between Barandon Walk and Testerton Walk. We went down all the way until we were by the box allotments very close to the tower, to the point marked on **Exhibit VR/1 as Figure 3**. David and I were standing with a neighbour from Grenfell walk and her 4 dogs. There were probably around 30 other people there.

9. To my recollection, when we first got down into the garden, the twelfth floor upwards of the Southern façade was on fire. I do not remember seeing any emergency vehicles from where I was standing though I remember hearing fire brigade sirens and the sound of helicopters in the background at the time that we got outside. I could see people in the tower windows in what I think were floors 10 and 11 shouting to us, asking for help. They were on the western side of the southern facade of the tower, further away from the fire. They were not people that I knew.
10. I shouted up to the people in the tower trying to reassure them that they would be ok and that help was on its way. A neighbour that I was standing with was asking their names, but I don't think they responded to his questions. I am not sure if the people in the tower could hear us.
11. I remember that the smoke coming from the tower was very black. I have asthma, and I am prescribed steroids through a dry inhaler and nasal spray. I didn't think of bringing these with me but I do not recall needing them as the wind was blowing the smoke away from us so from where we were standing, it was not difficult to breathe. I have since become aware the wind was blowing in a northerly direction that evening.
12. As well as people screaming, I could hear popping sounds, which at the time I thought was the gas pipes bursting. I could hear pops, pretty loud, which sounded like a car back firing, in rapid succession.
13. We were standing so close to the tower that a piece of burning cladding fell in front of us and a piece of debris fell on to David's head as he stood there. It was a big piece of black foam, around half a metre in length, trapezoid in shape. He shouted when it hit him on the head, but it bounced off of him. Thankfully it wasn't heavy. I think it left a black mark on his head.
14. It was awful to watch but I was just in total shock and couldn't bring myself to go back inside. I kept staring at the tower, not knowing what to do. It was dark when we went out, then whilst we were standing there it became light. At

around 5am I texted the girlfriend of my boss who is a friend of mine, to ask her to tell him that I would not be able to make it into work that day, and why.

15. As we were standing there watching the fire, I took photographs and live tweeted photographs and messages. I thought that the tweets may help the emergency services identify the location of the people trapped in the tower. **Exhibit VR/4** includes all of the Tweets that I posted that night and the following day.
16. The first one states "fire in my backyard. Pray for those in Latimer Road #Grenfell". On my computer and on mobile devices the time shows as 3.19am for this Tweet. My solicitor's computer showed the time of the Tweet as 2.19am, with the same corresponding hour difference for the following tweets. I made an enquiry to Twitter. **Exhibit VR/5** shows Twitter's response confirming that this Tweet was created at "02.19.42 + 0000". I understand that the "0000" signifies Universal Clock Time i.e. Greenwich Mean Time. British Summer Time is 1 hour ahead of this and therefore it would seem that 3.19am is the time that the first Tweet was sent.
17. At 3.25am I tweeted "Latimer Road Parts of the Tower failing [sic] off. #fire #Latimerrod.
18. At 3.26am I tweeted to encourage others to re-tweet another Twitter user who said he was trapped in a flat on floor 10 of the tower.
19. At 3.29am I tweeted "Latimer Road. Fire fighters doing their best to save lives #latimerroadfire #westlondon. The accompanying photo shows the fire brigade's hoses spraying across the Southern façade of the Tower, from the South Eastern corner. I could not see the fire engines from where I was standing.
20. At 3.32am I tweeted "New cladding falling off in flames #latimerroad #latimerroadfire #westlondon #fire".



21. At 3.42am I tweeted a photograph and "Falling debris, fire still going #latimerroad #latimerroadfire #westlondon."
22. At 3.59am I tweeted "People still in Grenfell Tower. Windows don't open! #latimerroad #latimerroadfire #westlondon." I said this because from where I was standing it looked as though the windows of the flats where people were trapped inside were shut.
23. At 4.06am I tweeted "Lady with child stranded 11th floor Grenfell Tower NOW #latimerroad #latimerroadfire #fire." I have not been able to identify who this was. I saw a woman in the window screaming for help, holding something which looked like a child. I remember watching and feeling helpless. She was coming back and forth from the window.
24. At 4.11am, I tweeted "Police say Grenfell Tower might collapse – there are ppl still inside! #latimerroad #latimerroadfire #fire". I said this because police officers began asking us to move back and because at around this time, I could hear police officers knocking on and kicking down doors of walkways residents evacuating them. I understood that this was because the officers were concerned for residents' safety.
25. At 4.17am I tweeted "still burning" with a photograph of the burning tower.
26. At 4.35am I posted a photo of someone whom I could see trapped in the tower, and tweeted "Person trapped #Grenfell Tower THIS WINDOW." This person was in a flat in the middle of the south façade of the tower. I think this person escaped and may have been one of the last people to get out, as I have seen someone that looks like him in media coverage since but I can't be sure. I don't know what happened to any of the other people that I saw trapped in the tower.
27. Whilst standing at, or close to, the point marked on **Exhibit VR/1 as Figure 3** I took photographs of the burning tower, which I exhibit as **Exhibit VR/6 to VR/16**. The photographs were taken with my phone. From where I was standing, I could see both the southern façade and the south eastern corner of the Tower. The photographs show fire spreading from the eastern side of the

southern façade (to the right on the photographs), to the western side of the southern façade (to the left on the photographs). According to the metadata on these photographs, they were taken between 3.10am and 9.35am on 14 June 2017. The timings of the photographs are marked on the enclosed exhibit index.

28. **Exhibit VR/14** taken at 04.31 shows a flat in the tower engulfed in flames. Two floors below there is a flat with its light on. There was someone trapped in that flat which is why I took the photograph.
29. At around 5 or 5.30am we tried to go back into Barandon Walk. Police were standing at the bottom of the walkway leading to the front entrance in the place marked as **figure 4** on **Exhibit VR/1**, and said we were not allowed to enter. I was very upset as we'd left our apartment unsecured, the lights were on and the balcony door was open. I was also worried about our cats. Everyone was in shock. People were congregated at the end of the walkway. We sat on a bench under the tree. Men who we thought might be from one of the nearby mosques, came to offer us water and food. We were looking for our neighbours to make sure they were ok.
30. For the next 2 days, we stayed with a friend of David's. We were not able to re-enter our flat until Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> June, and within 2 hours of being let back in we were evacuated again. I recall being aware that we were fortunate compared to many of our neighbours, who had been forced to sleep outside over that week.
31. The fire and its aftermath have had a devastating impact on me including on my health. Prior to the fire, I was involved in advocating on behalf of the residents of the estate, and protested against the building of the Kensington Alridge Academy. I anticipate that I will wish to make a further statement in respect of the aftermath, its effect upon me and my concerns regarding the management of the estate and the refurbishment of the tower for Phase 2 of the inquiry.

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

Signed: V Ruo

Dated: 18/5/2018

