

IN THE MATTER OF THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

STATEMENT OF YOUSRA CHERBIKA

Preamble

1. I make this statement from my own personal knowledge and from matters that I have been told about by others; where the information does not come from my own personal knowledge I make this clear below.
2. I make this statement because I lived at [REDACTED] Grenfell Walk at the time of the fire. I saw the early stages of the fire spreading and the fire fighters outside the Tower and inside what I now know to be Flat 16. During the night I spoke to residents in the Tower who passed away, including my friend Nur Huda El Wahabi.

Personal background

3. [REDACTED] I lived at [REDACTED] Grenfell Walk with my Mum, Dad, my brother [REDACTED] and my brother [REDACTED] when the fire happened. And now there's a new baby. We moved there when I was [REDACTED]
4. I went to school at [REDACTED] It was good. I was keeping up with my studies and everything – it was fun. It was safe and close to home so I didn't have to wake up that early. The teachers were nice. I liked PE, I liked football. I support Chelsea. I always used to play football in the park after school. Sometimes I would bring friends home then go to the park. It was convenient. I would come home and do my home work as quick as I can so I could play out. I used to play football with Nur Huda. I used to play in the park with Nur Huda, [REDACTED] .. loads of girls. Kids from the school. Most of the kids used to play in the park. There was a park behind

our house that we called the 'back park' – a whole green area. We used to also play in the front park. It was much bigger before the refurbishment, there were football pitches on the other side of the Tower.

5. That's one of the things I miss the most, people knocking me up. Nur Huda used to just stand at the bottom of the Walk and shout up: "*Yousra!*". She used to bring her brother along and make me bring mine. I felt safe at home. It was a calm, normal house, we were happy and we had no need to worry. Everything was normal to us.
6. Ramadan brings you even more close. As I got older sometimes I would just want some space! We used to go to the mosque as a family. As soon as the prayer goes, you all eat together, you feel a strong connection. You understand how each other are feeling. In Ramadan we're all together trying to pass the time- we watch movies and go out shopping. Me and my mum like chick flicks, my dad just likes anything with Jackie Chan in it.
7. I knew a lot of people from the Tower, included who passed away:
 - a. Nur Huda El Wahabi was my best friend. I knew her my whole life. She was older than me, and our families knew each other from Morocco. They were our neighbours in Morocco as well as Grenfell. I knew her brothers and her mum and dad. My brother [REDACTED] was best friends with her younger brother Mehdi. Her family lived in Flat 182 on the 21st floor.
 - b. I knew Firdaws Hashim (who I now know lived in Flat 192 on the 22nd floor) from when we were younger, we used to go to the little Arabic school under my house. Nur Huda went there with us too. I knew Firdaws' brothers and I knew her parents a bit.
 - c. I knew [REDACTED] who lived in Flat 183 on the 21st floor) from school. I knew her sister and her mum and dad. We used to play in the park.
 - d. I knew Steve (Power, who I now know lived in Flat 122 on the 15th floor) and his dogs – once when we were in the park, his dogs just jumped on my brother. He couldn't say sorry enough! After that he always used to say hello to me.

- e. I knew Jessica (Urbano Ramirez who I now know lived in Flat 176 on the 20th floor) from school, she was in the year above. I would see her on Snapchat all the time and she was always with her friends in the area, having fun. She was always really cheerful.
 - f. I knew Mierna (Choucair)'s family. I knew her mum. I now know family lived in Flat 193 on the 22nd floor. She was really, really nice. I'm really close with her best friend [REDACTED], we've known each other for a long time. I used to see Mierna around the area. I remember meeting her at school. She was a genuine person. [REDACTED] told me after that she said that I was nice and that she wanted to be friends.
 - g. I knew Biruk and his mum Berkti Haftom (who I now know lived in Flat 155 on the 18th floor) – I went to school with him. She was a nice lady, she used to work all the time. She loved Biruk a lot. She'd never walk past without saying hello and having a conversation with you.
8. I knew lots of faces – I'd always say hello to everyone. I knew more faces than names. It was a strong community – we all knew each other. You would always know someone wherever you would go – there was always someone to have your back. We were a tight community, we had a lot of fun, we were normal people.

13 June 2017

9. I remember going to school, I remember being in English. I remember it being really sunny. I don't remember what I did after school. We broke our fast but we were waiting for my dad [REDACTED]. My little brothers had gone to bed. I was watching Extreme Cheapskates in the living room with my mum. I think my uncle Elias was round at ours, he always used to come over and eat with us. He probably went to [REDACTED] with my dad.

14 June 2017

First awareness

10. I remember my mum got a call and she said there was a fire in the block. We didn't think anything of it because there have been fires before in blocks around us. I said "*Can I go downstairs and watch it?*" She said "*no stay here, it's cold outside*".
11. My dad was outside, he popped his head in. I asked if I could come with him. He said "*just quickly, because I'm hungry*". I was wearing a vest, pyjama bottoms, no socks, I put my mum's big fat massive coat on and my Flux's trainers. I ran out after him. We went down the stairs to where the fire was.
12. When we were watching the fire there was about 5-8 of us. People started coming down, it was mostly Muslims to begin with. People started calling each other and coming down. I saw the fire fighters come and hook the hose up to something in the Tower. They were telling us to stand back because there was stuff falling down. They told us to move back out of the way.

How the fire spread

13. I was filming on Snapchat. I didn't think anything of it at first. It died down a little bit and then it started getting bigger and bigger. I said to my dad why is it taking so long to put the fire out.
14. My dad was talking to an [REDACTED] guy – he said "*that's my flat*". I think he said he was sleeping on the sofa. He said he heard something go "*bang*" and he said his fridge exploded and he saw fire on the side. He said he woke up his wife and then he told her to get stuff so she was packing a suitcase, and at the same time he was banging on people's doors on the fourth floor and telling them there was a fire. She was still upstairs packing a suitcase.
15. The fire was still not going out. My mum called me and I showed her the fire on FaceTime – by now it had spread up a floor. When it was going up to the next bit there were bits of flecks and stuff coming down from the fire. It was just like the flecks that normally come off a fire. My mum said it was normal for the fire to go up one floor. It felt like something lifted off my shoulders when she said that, I felt relieved.

16. I saw the fireman strolling across in front of the Tower. He was holding a hose and walking slowly. I was scared about the fire and the people in the Tower but because he was walking slowly I felt reassured. Maybe he didn't realise how serious it was going to be.
17. I saw the fire fighter inside the flat and I think he might have been holding a hose, he was doing something to try and put the fire out. I remember him looking over and I heard him shouting down to the fire fighters outside of the Tower, I couldn't hear what he said but his face looked tense. He was shouting to the fire fighters who were telling us to get back. There was a fire fighter on the bottom of the Tower with a hose. I don't think it was the same guy who was strolling along, I think someone else took the hose from him. He was trying to put the fire out from the outside.
18. I remember the [REDACTED] guy's wife coming out with a dark coloured suitcase. I don't remember where she went but I don't see her after that. The [REDACTED] guy's and my dad were filming. My mum was still on the phone – she said *"Go back, both of you."* The phone cut off so I put it in my pocket to not waste the battery.
19. I saw a piece of fire go into the tree in front of us. It was the size of a piece of paper. It got bigger, it must have caught on to the leaves or something. Then I think it died out. I had taken a step back but I made sure I knew where my dad was. The fire went up the building more. It was going up from the bottom so it was hard to see the flames catching on. It was starting to go up one side of the window, and then I remember it being on two windows at exactly the same height. My friends were texting me saying *"oh my god, there's a fire"*. A lot of my friends started coming to where we were.
20. I thought it was still normal for a fire to do that – I only realised it was weird when my mum started panicking. I was showing her the fire on FaceTime and she started to panic when it spread to the next floor. I started screaming and shouting at my dad in Arabic, I was saying *"Get back, can we go now, please please!"* I was feeling really tense and worried, and scared, and frightened.

21. I think my mum called Nur Huda, I think she told her to wake her mum up. Me and my mum were calling her. I was stood behind the tree, a bit further back by the end of the playground. I think it must have been quite soon after the fire spread to the 6th floor because of where I was stood. I spoke to Nur Huda – she said *“I’ve got missed calls from you and your mum.”* I told her *“there’s a fire in your block”*. Nur Huda said she was going to come down. I said *“Wake up your brothers, come quickly, forget about your stuff.”* She said *“Okay cool, I’m coming down now. Don’t worry.”* I said *“Okay, I’ll see you later.”* That was the last time I spoke to her.
22. My dad called his friend Yousef who lived in the Tower and told him to get his family out. He said *“If you don’t get out you’re going to die”*. I don’t think I was there when they came out, but I think my Dad saw them later on.
23. The fire started spreading quicker and quicker. There was loads of stuff falling down. I was scared so I ran back towards the leisure centre. My phone ended again – I think the data ran out. I was screaming to my dad to come back away from the building.
24. I saw a woman screaming, she was sat down by the plants in front of the leisure. She was white and she had dark hair, she was probably in her late twenties and she was wearing her pyjamas and a grey dressing gown and she kept screaming *“My son, my son. My son’s in there.”* I’ve never seen someone scream like that before. I didn’t think anyone would die at this point, I trusted the fire fighters.
25. I looked back at the Tower, I called my dad and screamed *“Let’s just go, I don’t want to stay here any more.”* I thought the Tower would fall, or the stuff that was falling from it would drop on me. I saw loads just bashing on the floor. I thought it was going to blow up or drop on our house. Dad said *“you go up”*. I think I must have pushed the buzzer for our flat, I ran up the stairs and when I got to our front door my mum was coming out with the buggy. My brother [REDACTED] was sleepy, he had just woken up.
26. The only people who knew there was a fire were the people who had been called up by their friends and family. Mum told me to hold my little brothers on the top of the ramp. She went back to the flat and I think she got the important stuff – keys, passports, money. I didn’t know what to do. I tried to move back a bit because I was scared.

27. [REDACTED] asked me *"Is Mehdi alright?"* I said *"Yeah they're fine, don't worry. I called his sister, they're going to get out. They were the first people we called."* I was going to call her again but I thought she would be out already. I called other people from the Tower: I called Firdaws, and it went straight to voicemail. I called [REDACTED] and it went to voicemail. They were the only numbers I had. I think I tried both of them again but it was going straight to voicemail.
28. Everyone was just running everywhere. I saw my uncles Elias and Hamza. They knew Yasin as well. There was loads of other Moroccan families there. They were close with them from the area. My uncle Elias came up and said *"Is my sister alright?"* I remember hearing him speaking to my dad on the phone. They were all just running everywhere. He said *"You lot alright here?"* I said *"Yeah fine"*.

Grenfell Walk

29. Mum was on the top of balcony, I must have gone up to her. She was screaming *"Get out the Tower, get out get out"*. I started screaming with her. The whole time I was in denial about something bad happening. I started screaming because my mum was doing it. I remember seeing people's lights turn on. There was a woman who came to the window, she said: *"What's the matter?"* My mum said *"there's a fire, get out now, hurry up!"* She went to go leave her flat, and then she came back to the window – she said *"they're not letting me out."* Mum said *"Push with all your might, tell them to let you out otherwise you're going to die."* I know she got out the flat, she saw my mum at Latimer Road station – she said *"thank you so much for helping me."*
30. Mum started knocking on everyone's doors – she was worried about the gas, because the gas pipes in the walkways are all connected. She was worried the Tower might fall. I said *"Mum just leave them, nothing's going to happen to them."* I remember Aziza coming out. I used to play with her daughter in the park. I remember her coming out with one of her children, she just looked at the Tower, you could see the reflection of the fire in the windows of KAA. You could see the flames coming out, they had already spread around the corner. Mum said *"Stay where you are, I'm going to find your dad."* I think my brother started shouting with me.

31. I remember a woman on one of the top floors, not the top floor but one of the highest. She was more to the left but in the middle. It was hard to see what she looked like because it was dark, but I don't think she had her hair covered. She was probably about my mum's age. I think she had pots or pans, she was banging on the window, I could hear it. I looked up. There was no-one around me on my side, everyone had gone to the bottom base of the Tower. She was shouting to me "*Please can you get someone to help me?*" I said "*I don't know what to do*". I didn't want to leave my brothers. I was screaming "*There's a woman there!*" She was saying "*I'm too young to die, please help me, please help me...*" repeating herself over and over. I started proper screaming at the top of my voice: "*Get the woman out, you're going to kill her!*"
32. I must have called my mum. I was worried when my parents didn't pick up the phone – what if they had run inside? My dad's the type of person who would do that. I was thinking I shouldn't have left him.
33. I think my mum came back up by herself. I think she tried to knock on people's houses from the Walkway and scream at the Tower to get people's attention again. She said on the other side there was a lot of people. She said "*We need to get you away from here.*" I was asking my mum about Nur Huda. I wanted to know that she was alright. I asked my mum "*Is she ok? Have you seen her?*" My mum was trying to reassure me, she said "*She's smart, she'll tell her family.*" I was still shouting at the Tower, trying to wake people up.
34. [REDACTED] wanted his PS4 – I thought "*why are you thinking about that?*" I thought we'd be going back home after – I didn't know we wouldn't be going home again.
35. We went to my nan's house in the car. Mum had called my nan before. Nan thought it was just a little fire. Mum said it was a big one. She was trying to tell nan without saying it in front of us. When we got there, she said "*Just hold my kids, I don't want them to see anything else.*" She helped us get in with the buggy and then shot off. I said "*Mum, stay with us*" – she replied "*no, I need to make sure they're ok.*"
36. We were worried about everyone who was there – it was a living nightmare. My phone wasn't charged properly but my uncles had taken their chargers with them, so I couldn't

charge it. I kept calling mum, at times she wasn't answering. Dad wasn't answering. I thought they were dead. We turned on the news, nan saw it and saw the severity and started panicking a lot – she wasn't shouting but she was saying *"Why did your mum go back? Call her! Call her!"*

37. We had to quickly eat. I called my mum and said *"Come eat"*, she said *"I can't eat, I can't eat, I can't leave it like this."* Me and my nan were in the kitchen and I think [REDACTED] went upstairs and fell asleep. My phone died and then my uncle Yousef's phone died. Hamza came back, nan asked him *"Where's Hanan, Hicham and Elias?"* He said *"It's getting worse"*. We had the news on all night. Hamza said he had to go back, because Yasin was in there. Nan said *"Tell your sister, your brother and Hicham to come back with you"*. I think he came back two times. We were worrying because our phones were dead. We had no contact with anyone, just the news. We kept trying to call mum and dad from the house phone but they weren't answering. At one point we saw my dad on the news, either on the BBC or Sky News. That was a big relief when we saw him, he looked distressed, he just looked powerless. He looked like it didn't seem real to him.

The immediate aftermath

38. Nan had been telling to go to sleep. When she got tired, she said *"Make sure you wake me up before you go to sleep."* I went to sleep at 7, and woke up at 7.30, I remember the times because the news was on all night. Mum didn't get back until 8am. She said *"I was just making sure that everyone was alright, but the fire is still going."*
39. She told my nan that at 3am the Walk was evacuated, I remember her telling my nan that there were riot police pushing my dad off the Walk. I didn't know what the word evacuated meant, it wasn't a word that I'd ever had to use. I knew we couldn't go back to the house that night but I was confused, I wasn't sure if it was permanent.
40. Mum and dad and I had maybe another half an hour's sleep. I didn't have to go to school the next day because it was closed. I wanted to go see the Tower and our flats. I went back down with my mum later that evening, to see if we could help and to see what was going on.

41. My mum said we needed to get some donations from the centres. My uncle Elias was saying "*Hanan, why are you getting that stuff?*" I don't think my uncle knew that we had been evacuated. Mum said "*We can't go back to the flat*". That's when I realised that we wouldn't be going back.
42. When we got to the Tower, I could see fire inside the flats. Most of the windows still had fire inside them. We had to wear gas masks. There were lots of Muslim guys holding bottles of water, giving water to people had to break their fast and for all the people that were there.
43. We went back to the Tabernacle church, on the way to my nan's house. We took some clothes but thought other people need it more than us.
44. On Friday I had to go to [REDACTED] – I could see lots of children, most of them had their uniform on. I hadn't showered or brushed my hair. I had to borrow someone's old clothes. I didn't even care. Loads of people thought I was dead, because they couldn't get through to me when my phone died. There were lots of people hugging me. Everyone was just shocked. Even the teachers just looked lost. On that day all of the children in school were very emotional. The boys felt like they couldn't cry but you could see it in their faces.

Media

45. Three days after the fire we were told by one of the Tower residents that we could get a hotel, we wanted to get out from under my nan's feet so we went straight there. My friend [REDACTED] came to see me. We decided to write a song to express our feelings. We chose the song 'Read All About It' by Emeli Sande because our friend Firdaws sang it in the 'KAA's Got Talent' talent contest at school. The lyrics are about Firdaws, Nur Huda and all of our friends. It was Nur Huda who inspired me to write the song and the lyrics. We made a music video for the song, which is called "Fire in Grenfell", and I exhibit this video as YC/01.
46. [REDACTED] and I were interviewed by Jon Snow on 12 December 2017 for Channel 4 News. I exhibit this video as YC/02.

47. We were also interviewed by Fiona Rutherford for BuzzFeed News, in an article published on 24 December 2017. I exhibit this article as YC/03.
48. [REDACTED] and I were interviewed by Lorraine Kelly on her ITV programme 'Lorraine' on 11 June 2018, and I exhibit this video as YC/04.
49. On 13 June 2018 we were interviewed by the Evening Standard, and I exhibit this article as YC/05.

Statement of Truth

I confirm that the content of this witness statement is true.

I confirm that 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: CherBika

Date: 16-08-18