

IN THE MATTER OF THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

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**STATEMENT OF ZOHRA AL-ASSAD**

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**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 was a resident of Grenfell Walk at the time of the fire and I witnessed the early stages of the fire spreading and the emergency response. I had direct involvement with a number of the Grenfell Tower residents before the fire, including those who sadly passed away. Me, my husband Taib Al-Assad and my sons Ahmed Al-Assad and Abderahim Al-Assad are all Core Participants of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry.

**Personal background**

3. I was born on [REDACTED]. I am married and a mother of five children, three of whom live with me. I came to the U.K from Morocco in 1971.
4. My first language is Arabic. I do not speak English very well, nor can I read or write it. When I need help with my English, my children help me.
5. I am currently living with my husband Taib at [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]
6. Before the fire, my health was generally good, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] I used to be able to walk properly and had

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██████████ I used to use the stairs in my flat, albeit slowly, using the bannisters to aid me.

7. I had no mental health issues prior to the fire.

8. Before the fire, my husband had ██████████  
██████████

### **Living in Grenfell Walk**

9. Me and my family moved to ██████ Grenfell Walk in 1976, just after the building was built. We rented the property from the council.
10. At the time of the fire in Grenfell Tower, I was living with my husband Taib, my daughter Selwa who is ██████████, and my two sons Abdulrahim who is ██████ and Ahmed who is ██████
11. Our flat was set out over two floors. The entrance is on the upper floor of the flat where there were two bedrooms and a bathroom. Downstairs there was another bedroom and a small toilet room.
12. I was happy living at Grenfell Walk. I did not have any concerns about whether there would be any sort of emergencies as these are not particularly things I would think about.
13. When me and my husband moved into the property the council did not give us any information regarding fire safety, I therefore did not know what to do in an emergency. Initially we did not have a smoke alarm in the flat, however, after quite a while the council put in a smoke alarm in the kitchen, the downstairs corridor and the upstairs corridor.
14. My front door was changed around 10 years ago, it did not close automatically in that it had to be forced shut. Initially it only had one lock on the door, however, we installed a second lock as we did not feel one lock was sufficient.

### **Concerns about the changes to Grenfell Tower**

15. I have visited the Tower many times before the fire. I noticed there were a lot of pipes in the corridors which were not there prior to the renovations

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16. I used the lifts inside Grenfell Tower, I had been told by other residents that the lifts would often breakdown or get stuck, but I had never personally been stuck in the lifts myself.
17. I used to discuss with the residents of Grenfell Tower that the cladding was dangerous as it appeared to suffocate the building, so to speak, however, I did not speak to the council about these concerns.

### **13<sup>th</sup> June and the hours leading up to the fire**

18. I was at home on the 13<sup>th</sup> June before the fire. My son Ahmed came home from his friend's house around 10:30pm and my husband came home [REDACTED] at around 12:30am.
19. My son Ahmed left the house at around 1am. A few minutes later, whilst I was in the kitchen, my daughter Fatima called me from her house that faces the Tower and told me "There is a fire we need to get out." At the same time my son came back home and told us to get out of the flat. Some of the neighbours knocked on the door as well telling us to get out.
20. I did not hear any smoke alarms, but I could hear people screaming.
21. From just outside my front door I could see the fire as I am opposite the block. When I opened my front door, I could see the fire and the smoke came into my house. The smoke hit us in the face and was black. There was fire flying off the Tower. Pieces of metal were flying around.

### **14 June 2017**

#### ***Leaving the property***

22. Me and my family were worried whilst leaving the property, having said that we did not think it would reach such an extent.
23. All five of us left the property, no one was left in the flat after this.

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24. We did not take any belongings with us as we believed the fire would be put out shortly and we would go back home.

### *The fire*

25. Initially, when my daughter first informed us of the fire, it was in the corner of the Tower on around the fourth floor. By the time we all came outside it started to go around the building and upwards. In around half an hour most of the Tower was on fire.
26. In the blink of an eye the fire had spread. It went from corner to corner I do not understand how it happened so fast. It was as if someone poured gas over the building and lit it on fire.
27. The fire was a mixture of red, green and blue. It was lots of different colours, but it was a fire, a big fire. We could feel the heat from the fire
28. The smoke was extremely thick and black in colour. The smoke was choking.
29. There was ash flying around all over us and on the floor.
30. I did not take any pictures or videos of the fire.
31. I did not call 999 as they were already there.

### *The firefighters*

32. I do not believe the firefighters were helping as much as they could have. They could have done more during the early stages of the fire.
33. When the firemen came they did not have water, they looked like they were looking for water I do not know how they can not have water. I saw a fireman taking water from the drain next to the station but even that was not enough, not a lot of water was coming out of there.
34. The hoses did not go high maybe around the middle of the Tower. I could only see water being sprayed on one side of the Tower, the side of the Tower that the station is on.

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35. I saw a ladder on the side that faces the station, but it was a short ladder it did not even reach half of the building. Maybe if they had a longer ladder that reached higher up more people could have been saved.
36. The firemen did not look strong they looked shocked.
37. There were different types of police and firemen, they were wearing different uniforms.
38. When the fire had taken over the building the police started to tell people to go towards the station.
39. There were riot police who were pushing us and everyone that was around towards the bridge at Latimer Road station. They were telling us to go so that we could not see what was happening.
40. The fire engines were near the station, but it did not look like they had a route to go closer to the building as there is the school that blocked the road.
41. The residents were screaming help and they responded saying stay there. They should have gone to help them. I do not understand why they did not help.
42. The fire looked like it would have been controllable at the start, but the firefighters were overpowered by it and could not control it. It looked as if they were defeated by the fire, but firefighters are supposed to have experience with fire and putting them out. Back home in Morocco firefighters go into a fire and bring people out, we are in London, a first world city and they just could not help the people in the Tower.
43. The firemen did not look like they were in a rush or running around.
44. The community that came back from the night prayers at the mosque looked like they were doing more to help and bring out the residents.
45. The firefighters did not attempt to speak to me.

**Once outside**

46. The police told a large group of us to go under the bridge at Latimer Station, other than that nobody from the authorities spoke to us directly or attempted to help us.

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47. We saw a man that tied bedsheets together and tried to climb down the Tower from maybe around the fourth or fifth floor. There was a man, I believe he was an [REDACTED] man, he was shouting up at the man that tied the sheets together telling him to come down. The man that tied the sheets ended up surviving
48. We stayed at Latimer Station for a short while and around 4am we went to my daughter Fatima's house, as she lives nearby. We stood there whilst people were burning inside. The fire took over the whole building. We could see people that were on the top of the building trying to get help but did not manage. The smoke was worse at this time it was thick and black, the fire was blue and orange. The ash was all over the school, all over the floor.
49. Me and my husband feel like we are on a long road and at the end of that road there are 2 pathways and we do not know which one to take. We feel as if we are lost. I will never live in a tower block, I am too scared to live in a tall building

#### **Medical assistance**

50. I did not require medical assistance at the time. Due to the level of shock I was in over everything that was happening I was not thinking about my health at the time and therefore, did not feel the need to get medical assistance.

#### **Assistance after the fire**

51. The council did not help me or my family, we stayed at my daughter's house for a few nights until a hotel was provided to us.
52. We often went to Westway Sports Centre, where they provided food and clothes. They also provided beds to those that needed them. If it were not for the volunteers we would have nothing, it was all charity, the council did nothing in terms of aiding us to rebuild our lives.
53. There were people at Westway that would help people that couldn't speak English, providing translations for people that needed to speak to the council.

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54. We went to Al-Manaar mosque and Portobello Rugby Club. The Rugby club did not give us any clothes, they would say they have clothes to give out but whenever we went they would then say they do not have any left. Al-Manaar gave us some clothes. I feel the best relief centre was Westway as that is where we went the most and found the most help available.
55. There were TMO and RBKC representatives at Westway. We spoke to them explaining our situation, they asked us about our home in Grenfell Walk, for example, how many bedrooms it had and who lived there with me. Other than this they did not advise us on what would happen next.
56. My children were the ones that kept pestering the council for a hotel room. They had to ask them several times before eventually they provided us with a booking in [REDACTED] Hotel in [REDACTED], however I did not want to be that far away from my daughter Zohra's house. Zohra suggested for my other daughter Selwa and my son Ahmed to go there and for me and my husband to stay with her until something closer was found. My other son Abdelrahim was sent to a different hotel as there were no more rooms available in [REDACTED]
57. A few days later the council eventually managed to get us a room at the [REDACTED], which is where we have been for the last nine months since the fire.
58. Me and my husband feel that TMO are not as helpful as the council once were. In the 70's, when it was the council that dealt with issues they were much more efficient in resolving the problems, however, once TMO came into place they were not as good, it almost seemed as if they did not care as much.
59. After 10 days I was finally allowed to go into my house just to get my phone, when I was there I saw that a big piece of metal had fallen outside my flat. All my clothes inside the flat smelt of smoke all the furniture.

#### Other matters

60. The police did not ask us for a statement. I have not made any other statements.

61. [REDACTED]

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62. Since the fire, I have been suffering from breathing problems from the smoke, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] I feel as if my head is always heavy from all  
the thoughts from the fire, seeing my friends burn and die. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]
63. I do not wish to go to court to testify as I do not want to have to relive these traumatic  
events. I give permission for my statement to be read out in court if necessary,
64. The Inquiry may come back to me if they need further information.

### Statement of Truth

I confirm that the contents of this witness statement are 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:



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