

**THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY**

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**WITNESS STATEMENT OF WINSTON DOWARRIS**

**[REDACTED] HURSTWAY WALK**

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I, **WINSTON DOWARRIS**, of [REDACTED], London, formerly of flat [REDACTED] Hurstway Walk, London, **WILL SAY** as follows:-

**Introduction**

1. I am a core participant in the Grenfell Tower Inquiry and was present at the fire, outside the Tower, on the 14 June 2017. I lived in [Hurstway Walk], near Grenfell Tower and witnessed the fire. I was born on the [REDACTED]
2. I lived at [REDACTED] Hurstway Walk] for approximately eight years before the fire. I lived alone but my daughter Kadelia Dowarris would often come and visit.
3. This statement is mainly about what I saw on 14 June 2017 and deals with what the Inquiry has called 'Phase 1' matters, setting out what happened to us when the fire broke out and consumed Grenfell Tower. I will provide greater detail of 'Phase 2' matters as the Inquiry progresses although I will set out some brief details of what are Phase 2 matters later in this statement.

### **The evening of 13 June 2017 and the morning 14 June 2017**

4. The fire started at 12:54 am, I understand. This was whilst I was asleep in my flat.
5. I became aware of the fire when my daughter Kadelia woke me up. I think that it must have been at around 01:30 am, though I cannot be certain. Kadelia said, "Dad, Dad, Grenfell is on fire. It's going to fall on top of us."
6. She really thought the Tower was going to collapse on top of us, when she had seen Grenfell Tower burst into flames. Just as my daughter woke me and I saw the fire for the first time, the police were knocking on the door and telling us to get dressed and to get out.
7. I looked out the window and it looked like an inferno. It looked like nothing I had ever seen in my life. It was painful, and sad. You could see straight away that not many people would escape from it.
8. The police warned us that the Tower might fall on us in Hurstway Walk and that we had to get out.
9. I hurriedly put on some clothes and was ushered out by the police into Latimer Road, where there was a lot of confusion and commotion.

### **Outside Grenfell Tower**

10. Outside there were lots of police, firemen and fire engines. Everyone was really confused. Myself and the other residents were looking at different people crying and hugging. The surrounding streets and walkways were mostly blocked.
11. The school that had been built nearby was in the way and preventing the fire engines from accessing the Tower. The new swimming pool was also blocking the path of the

emergency services. From where I was standing in Latimer Road the fire engines could not get close enough to the building and they could not, from the outside of the building, get their hoses high enough onto the top levels of the Tower to put out the fire.

12. The fire was bright red, and spiralling around the building. It was shooting up floors on the outside of the Tower walls. There was thick, black smoke, and we were breathing it in. The police had contained us in on particular area so that we could not avoid inhaling the smoke and fumes. The building was burning bright red.
13. If I remember correctly, the fire was already on most of the building on the side I was looking at, when I was viewing it from Latimer Road, but there were some flats that were not yet on fire. You could see people waving, trapped inside those flats, and lights inside were on. In those flats suddenly the lights went out and it went pitch black, before the flats turned bright red. Then the flames burst out the windows where the people had been waving for help.
14. The fire seemed to spiral around the outside of building, and after one flat caught fire, the one above would also catch fire. It was travelling up and around.
15. The windows were not open. Many of them popped, as the heat made them burst.
16. I could hear screams from the Tower, people screaming out for help.
17. Cladding and plastic was falling off and dripping off the Tower. Burning debris was floating through the air, or even coming onto the flats at Hurstway Walk. Some charred light material had even come through the window of my flat while I was getting ready to leave.
18. The smoke was thick black and dark grey, and it engulfed the building.
19. When I first saw it out of my window, from my flat, the fire was only as far as the middle of the Tower. By the time I had got onto the street, the flames had nearly reached

the top of Grenfell Tower. This was probably only about 15 or 20 minutes. It was moving rapidly.

20. You could hear the crackling of the fire, and see bits of cladding debris flying in the air to near where we were on the street. I could hear the larger pieces of cladding landing near me. Sometimes I also heard a loud “pop”, but I was not sure what was causing that.
21. I could see both the smoke and the fire entering the flats in the Tower, from the outside. I could see that the plastic window frames were melting and buckling, and the glass windows were shattering. Then the fire would then creep inside and consume the flats.
22. I did not want to inhale anything because I have breathing difficulties, so I kept a flannel over my face most of the time. It was mainly a smoky smell, combined with other things I did not recognise in the smoke cloud.
23. I would later hear news stories of people jumping from the Tower, but I did not see this happen.
24. My daughter noticed that some of the residents in the building were waving towels outside the windows of their flats, whilst calling for help.
25. I could not believe what I was witnessing. I was in tears. I could not speak as I was in a state of shock.
26. We walked away and I was standing by a bus stop when I heard a blonde woman, I did not know her, talking on the phone. I discovered that she was on the phone to a man called Tony Disson who was in the Tower.
27. I knew him well, and so I took the phone from the lady and said in distress, “Tony, I’m sorry I can’t do anything. No one can. The firemen are all here and they won’t be able to get to you.” He then told me that he was locked in the bathroom in his flat. He had tried to open the door of his flat, but the handle was red hot. He told me that the concrete under the ground was burning his feet. Then all of a sudden the line went dead.

28. Tony was someone I had gone to school with, and had grown up with. I knew him and his entire family. To hear him die over the phone like that will haunt me forever. He and the others should never have died.
29. After listening to Tony I could not talk. He had been a close friend. I was distraught. I knew he was dead.
30. I remember trying to understand why this was happening to so many people. Afterwards, I kept hearing different stories from other people who were missing.
31. Because Kadelia and I did not have anywhere to go for shelter we decided to sit in her car, where it would be warmer.
32. Kadelia saw a young man (I do not know his name) who was in tears. She got out of her car and walked over to talk to him. He asked her to pray with him. She asked, "What is it?" and he explained that he could not find his family members.
33. The next day, at about 12 noon, my daughter went to the morgue but could not find the young man's family. When she came back later that day she told me that she had no news from the morgue.
34. While she had been away at the morgue, someone else, I am not sure who, had come over and told the boy that his mother had been found.
35. I was proud of my daughter but I did not want anyone else to see or experience what she had witnessed over the last few hours.
36. If you put people so high up in a Tower, then you must have a way to be able to get them down. The lifts had not been working properly at Grenfell Tower for years, and even the elderly had to walk up the stairs sometimes. That was the care that TMO showed for the people who subsequently lost their lives.

37. I cannot get over something like this. You can only feel what you feel. I saw too much pain, too much hurt and too much suffering that morning. I wanted to talk to people and try to use words to heal them, but you could not say anything to the other bystanders that would help them with the death of their families and friends.
38. Looking back on this, I think that what I want to see is justice for all those that died.

### **My experience of the fire fighters**

39. I did not encounter any fire fighters, except outside the Tower. I spoke to one on the night and thanked him for his hard work.
40. When had to go into the fire, you could see that the fire fighters were really putting themselves through it. Going in and out, not hesitating. One fire fighter was told, "That's enough!" Yet she went back into the Tower anyway. They kept going in and out.
41. When you hear the stories about them having to walk over people, that left me very confused, and an, because you were hearing it from them, so you wondered what horrors they must be going through now.
42. I remember seeing rows and rows of body bags being brought out by the fire fighters. I wondered what was going through their heads, having to pull out dead bodies. What kind of trauma must they be going through?
43. A fire fighter told some time later that he had stood on someone's body, and that the body then moved and a hand grabbed his ankle. He had to shake them off as he was carrying out someone else.

### **The events directly after the fire**

44. In the days following the fire I was not offered any support whatsoever.

45. The only support I have had was from Andrea Newton, from the Tenants' Association. She contacted the RBKC on my behalf, and pointed out to them that I did not have a key worker, or any assistance.
46. I was put in contact with my caseworker in November 2017. His name is Raymond Mitchell. He not done anything to help though. Only since the RBKC saw the news about my heart attack was I re-housed.
47. I called RBKC on the morning of the fire, but I could not get through. There was no answer when my daughter called them either. She decided to call the Tenants Management Organisation ("TMO") instead, but they did not answer.
48. I decided to seek help from elsewhere. There was a church behind Hurstway Walk, with clothes and food, but I did not use any of that.
49. There were Muslim organisations providing food as well, but I could get food so I did not take any from them. I went to my brother's place in West London instead.
50. In a situation like that, my heart was more for those who really needed it, like the people who came out the Tower with only a dressing gown.
51. My daughter phoned the TMO, and they told her to find some money and put me in a hotel. That's when I phoned my friend in Brixton and went over there. We did not have any finance to put myself up in a hotel.
52. In the weeks that followed, the only money I got was from my pension and the kindness of other people. One lady in Notting Hill let me stay in a property there for a while, but I was all over the place. But there was no help from RBKC until recently, after the heart attack, which was a big shame.
53. The next time I tried to make contact with RBKC was when we went to their housing office under the flyover. They told me that they would contact me after I left my number. This was approximately two days after the fire.

54. A lot of people in the community had been talking about key workers, but I did not have a key worker, so I had sought them out. After I left my number, I was not contacted.
55. One woman on the Walkway Committee, her name was Andrea, I am not sure of her last name, spoke to me a few days after the fire. I do not remember precisely when. She assisted me in contacting the RBKC, but it was me who had to initiate contact with them.
56. One day, I believe two or three months after the fire, I took copies of the letters to the council's housing office at Latimer Road. I spoke to an officer there, and gave the letters to him. Another officer came in and then took the letters and threw them at me. I did not understand why I was being treated like this by the council.
57. I remember that the fire doors in Hurstway Walk were removed after the fire, and replaced with wooden doors. The council had ordered them to be changed, and some people refused to have them changed. People did not understand why metal fire doors were being replaced with wooden doors that were not marked as fire doors, and we had not been given an explanation.
58. Similar to this, some of the windows in Hurstway Walk were also removed and replaced with mesh after the fire. This meant the building was very, very cold.
59. I firmly believe that it only took death and disaster for that council to realise that people were living there. It should not be the case that it should take deaths for the council to give people fire doors.

### **Medical issues**

60. I suffered psychological injuries after the fire. I was asking myself questions that I could not answer. I was questioning myself about the tragedy. I was suffering from shock.

61. My daughter spent a lot of time with me and helped me see that I should not be taking it all on myself. She told me not to let it take me over. I was trying to avoid doing myself damage, by going to speak to friends, to understand what they were seeing or feeling. They would be people who would help.
62. The only support was when I found “Time to Talk”, and engaged with them. I had gone to the council to complain about my situation and get help, but they did not help me.
63. I had a breakdown and burst into tears trying to talk about Tony and other things to a woman from the Red Cross. I was trying to talk and unburden myself of things that I had seen, and it all came out and I broke down. The lady from the Red Cross told me that I needed help, so she phoned up “Time to Talk” and gave me the address of where to go.
64. I went there for over six months, and then it got too much for me. They were carrying me back in and out of my memories, and I did not want to be constantly thinking about it. I did not want to be talking to them for six months for them to be asking the same questions every time. I did not think it was helping me. It was keeping me stuck in the past.

### **Heart attack**

65. Every time I entered Hurstway Walk I felt stressed, and that I should not be there. One day I went to get some mail and as soon as I opened the door, I started feeling very uncomfortable, and I sat down on the bed. I felt pains across my chest. I thought I might have been having a stroke, so I made a phone call to Andrea, who ran a lot of the meetings for the Residents’ Association.
66. When I called Andrea she said I had to get to the bus stop, to get to the hospital. She ran out and met me at the bus stop, and an ambulance came and gave me morphine, and took me to a hospital in Hammersmith. It is called Hammersmith Hospital and it is on Du Cane Road. I do not know why I was given morphine. It may have been because I was in pain, but I was not told. I was probably in the ambulance for about half an hour, with

medical people talking to me, before it set off. I was rushed into theatre, and they operated immediately.

67. There was a blockage in two tubes near my heart, and there was not enough blood or oxygen getting to my heart. They said that I had had a heart attack before, in July or August 2017, when I had collapsed on the train. I thought it was a blackout but at the hospital they now said it was a heart attack.
68. I was in hospital for a few days after the operation.
69. ITN were the first journalists to speak to me. The journalist was a man named "Wraggs". I do not remember his first name. That was then followed by others, who came to see me in hospital. A woman from the Guardian came as well. I do not remember her name.
70. It was only after they had spoken to me when RBKC get in touch to re-housed me.
71. The RBKC had never given me any support whatsoever until the media got their attention and started asking questions. They kept telling me that I had fallen "under the radar". What radar that is I do not know?
72. One day shortly after the Guardian story, I met the deputy mayor of RBKC, Beinazir Lasharie, and she used the phrase "slipping under the radar" to me.
73. I actually wanted to know why nothing was done. Ms Lasharie said that she would investigate it, but I have not heard anything. She appeared on the TV after my heart attack, and I think she only did it to make the council appear like they were concerned. She has not done anything to help me. The journalist from ITN, called Wraggs, I do not remember his full name, interviewed her on the TV. She was asked about what happened to me and said something along the lines of, "He must have slipped through the net" when asked about why I had not been re-housed.
74. Below, by way of example, I have set out a table of links to press and TV media items about me which I believe only then prompted the council, in the end, to act to help me:

No	PUBLICATION	DATE	URL
1	Guardian	29/1/2018	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/jan/29/grenfell-fire-pensioner-heart-attack-bedsit">https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/jan/29/grenfell-fire-pensioner-heart-attack-bedsit</a>
2	Guardian	31/1/2018	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/jan/31/grenfell-fire-pensioner-rehoused-after-having-heart-attack-at-old-flat">https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/jan/31/grenfell-fire-pensioner-rehoused-after-having-heart-attack-at-old-flat</a>
3	ITN	29/1/2018	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bM_1518sq_4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bM_1518sq_4</a>

### **Housing**

75. In the days that followed the fire, I stayed in south London, with my friend Roy Gregoir. I stayed briefly with my brother, Errol Dowarris, in west London, [REDACTED] near [REDACTED]. Then I stayed with my cousin's in Bristol, and a friend in Notting Hill gate. I was basically sofa-surfing, or in sleeping bags. I often had to stay in sleeping bags because friends did not have enough space or bedding for me.
76. I felt unable to return to Hurstway Walk for around two months. Once I was allowed back in just after the fire, I had taken what clothes I could to see me through. I was not in the right place, psychologically, to return to the flat.
77. I did eventually go back to the flat and continued living in Hurstway Walk until January 2018.
78. If the council had any respect, they would have made housing arrangements for me. They had my address, my name, my phone number. They did not arrange anything until the media got involved and questioned them. This was in January 2018.
79. I went to see them about three times, and every time they were rude, or they said they did not have time to help. They fobbed me off, and did not assist me.

80. The first time I went to see them was at the “Kerb”, which is a kind of hub run by the council where residents could go and ask questions. It is across the road from Latimer Road, near Hurstway Walk. I saw a man sitting at a desk, and another man who seemed to be in charge of everyone. I gave him a letter from Guy’s and St Thomas’s Hospital saying I should not be in the flat. The man just said that I should go away and come back. The other person got the same letter and threw it at me, and asked me to take them to the Town Hall. I said he was behaving in a nasty way. He did not care.
81. The second time I went to a place in Hurst Way where the RBKC have people you could complain to. I went to see someone called Barry Quirk, and it was like talking to a dead horse. I wanted to raise the same issue in relation to my health and my housing. I complained that no one from the council had ever written to me to try and sort out my housing, prior or especially after the fire. He said that he would look into it, but he never did.
82. The third time, I spoke to a woman I think was called “Shutna”, who worked for the council. I told her I kept coming and complaining, and making the same points, but that nothing had been done to help me. When you go and speak to them, nothing happens unless you seem like you really needed the help, like some people were deserving of help and others were not. For example, as I complained about being re-housed, and the mental effect it was having on me, I felt like I was being dismissed.
83. They only listen to me and moved me after I had the heart attack and the press and media got involved.
84. If you are the government you are supposed to take care and protect people, but I felt there was no care or protection after this fire.
85. On the Monday after my heart attack, I started getting calls from someone at the council, offering to move me to a one bedroom flat. I asked for a two bedroom flat but she said I could only have a one bedroom.

86. She then called me back and said that they had a two-bedroom flat in [REDACTED] [REDACTED], with two beds, two bathrooms, and a shower.
87. I thought that it had taken them so long to get me out of Hurstway Walk, that it had taken a heart attack to get me out.
88. If I did not have people who had highlighted my plight then I would still be in Hurstway Walk.
89. There are still problems with the flat in [REDACTED], however. It needs decorating. It has not been decorated for years. It also does not have any working heating, and the washing machine does not work. It was not ready for me when I was moved in.

### **Pre-fire life**

90. I lived at [REDACTED] Hurstway Walk, W11 1WD with my daughter, Kadelia Dowarris, who had lived there for two years before the fire. She is [REDACTED] [REDACTED] She lived with me on and off during that period.
91. I used to live in [REDACTED] with my wife. I was divorced and I moved to Hurstway Walk with my daughter a number of years ago, but I do not remember exactly when. I think it was possibly seven or eight years ago. The flat was rented from RBKC.
92. My sister also lived in Hurstway Walk, her name is Virginia Sang. She still lives there. She is in her [REDACTED] and had lived there for at least 40 years. She used to live with my mother who also lived in Hurstway Walk. When my mother passed away my sister stayed there. This was in about 1985-1990, but I do not remember exactly when.
93. I would describe my flat as a bedsit. I would sleep on the sofa and my daughter would sleep in the bed, as there was not space for two beds.

94. The room was very claustrophobic. There was just one room, with a kitchen, and then a bathroom and separate toilet. I used to cook everything, and the smell would affect the clothes and the curtains, because the place was so small.
95. I had lived there for about 7 or 8 years. It was a council-owned property, and I was a council tenant. It was a secure tenancy.
96. Long before the fire, I believe about a year, my doctors from Guy's Hospital had been writing letters to RBKC expressing that because I had [REDACTED] the accommodation was not suitable.
97. RBKC did not respond to my numerous letters and those of my doctors and ignored the fact that my doctors had said that the accommodation was detrimental to my health.
98. One issue that was representative of how those of us that lived on Hurstway Walk were treated by RBKC was the automated skylights. The corridor that connected all the rooms was covered with skylights that were controlled by sensors. The sensors would open them in the summer, and sometimes even in the winter. This allowed rain in, and the hallway would become damp. The stench of damp was particularly unpleasant.
99. There were constantly leaks from water. If it snowed then the snow on the roof would melt and water would come into the hallways. People would often slip and slide, and then fall. I fell over a couple of times because of this. I did not report or raise any complaints regarding these incidents because I did not think I would get a satisfactory answer from TMO, based on my impressions of the TMO.
100. Other residents complained, however, but nothing changed or was done. It seemed to me that all of these issues were being ignored; it was clear that RBKC and the TMO did not care about the people that lived in the accommodation provided by the council.

### **Concerns about fire safety**

101. I had concerns about fire safety prior to the fire. There were never any fire drills and no information was given. I do not recall ever making a complaint or a report about my concerns.
102. The door to my flat was a fire door, and had two hinges. It was replaced a few months after the fire, with a wooden door, which I felt was less safe. I do not know why this was replaced. The TMO never really kept us informed or communicated with us.
103. There were no sprinklers in Hurstway Walk. Other residents in Hurstway Walk and other blocks had been complaining to the council, and had requested the installation of sprinklers. No sprinklers were ever installed, though. I personally did not raise that complaint with the council directly, but I heard from someone (I do not remember who) that it was raised with them.
104. I was concerned about the amount of rubbish that was often left in Hurstway Walk, as people would leave it on their landings ready to take the rubbish out. I could be put in a chute. But people still left rubbish in bags in the corridors. It had built up and was an obstacle.
105. My sister, Virginia Sang, who lived in Hurstway Walk, kept copies of the complaints she had sent to the Council. These were primarily complaints about Hurstway Walk and Grenfell. My sister is a Core Participant and will, I believe she will provide these to the Inquiry.
106. I joined the residents' association as a result of the fire, but I do not remember exactly when I joined.

#### **Concerns about modifications to Grenfell Tower**

107. When the refurbishment started, a friend of mine, Roy Gregoir, who often looks after me when I am sick and runs errands for me (especially since my heart attack), looked out across my window one day and pointed out everything that was being added to Grenfell Tower during the refurbishment. We could see a cross-section of the cladding as it was

being added to the Tower. Roy said to me, "If there is a fire, then it'll go up in smoke." I had not realised or understood, at the time, why he was saying this and he did not explain.

108. I was watching the contractors put the cladding up, and from a distance you could see that the cladding was made up of different materials. To me it looked very unsafe, and did not look like a good idea. I started to think about whether it could catch fire, as it looked like a foam.
109. People were aware Grenfell Tower was an eyesore and that what was being done was to cover it up to make it look better, but I felt like it looked like the Tower could catch light as a result.
110. It was obvious by looking at the Tower that the cladding did not look safe to me, because it was a type of foam. People in the community would talk often about this at the pub or when chatting with one another around the estate.
111. It was a close-knit community around the estate and in the Tower, and problems were not hidden. Everything was out in the open as people would talk about their issues; we only had each other to talk to. The TMO never listened to us.
112. Residents were concerned for years about the way in which the TMO was handling the refurbishment and had repeatedly complained to the TMO and RBKC about their fears. The TMO did not tackle any of the issues, such as the issues we had with the sunlights for example. All of the complaints just fell on deaf ears.
113. In my mind, the refurbishment was only designed to improve the external appearance of the Tower instead of improving the actual quality of the building. I believe RBKC only agreed to make these cosmetic changes because wealthy people from nearby had never liked looking at Grenfell Tower; they wanted it knocked down.
114. Lots of my friends passed away because of the way in which the refurbishment was handled and the subsequent dismissal of residents' concerns by the TMO and RBKC.

People like Tony Disson, Moses (I do not recall his second name), along with other people whose names I do not remember but faces I knew and had see around the area. I said hello all these people and saw them around in our community every day, but they died because the council did not listen to residents and did not listen to our concerns and complaints.


115. There is now shown to me, exhibited to this witness statement, marked “**WD 1**”, true copies of photographs of and around Grenfell Tower taken by my daughter on my mobile telephone on 14 June 2017, during the fire.

### **Conclusion**

116. The only thing I would like to say to the Inquiry is what I have said before. People need justice. We need justice. People have lost their souls in a fire that was not their fault. They did not intend to end their lives that way. It was not the fault of the people who lost their loved ones. Or the people who are suffering from trauma. All these neglectful people, who ignored people who lost their lives, have genuinely got to have answer the questions as to why this happened and who is to blame. We all want the truth.
117. Those concerned may not have meant the mistakes, but we see plainly that there was no care and there was no thought. In the end, you can see that there is a loss of many lives. I and the others are just asking for justice.
118. I do not know when all these things will be erased from my mind. It has made me mentally and physically sick in different ways. I had a heart attack, which was stress-related, and through all these things I have been forced to go through that were no fault of my own. They resonate in my mind, and in other people’s minds.

### **Statement of Truth**

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I confirm that I am willing that the statement forms part of the evidence before the Inquiry, and may be published on the Inquiries website, save for redactions indicated in the text, and those applied by the Inquiry.

Signed: 

**Winston Dowarris**

**Dated: 21 May 2018**

*Witness Name: Winston DOWARRIS*

*Statement No: 1*

*Exhibit: WD 1*

*Dated: 21 May 2018*

**THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY**

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**EXHIBIT WD 1**

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This is the exhibit marked “**WD 1**” referred to in the witness Statement of Winston Dowarris, dated 21<sup>st</sup> day of May 2018.

**Signed:**

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'W.P. Dowarris', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

**Winston Dowarris**

**Dated: 21 May 2018**

