

IN THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT

OF

HIND RAIHANI

Introduction

1. I am the above-named person and I lived at flat 126 on the 15th floor at Grenfell tower with my mother, Aziza Raihani. I am 24 years old.
2. I make this statement in relation to the fire at Grenfell Tower last year, where my mother and I lived.
3. The facts and matters set out in this witness statement are within my own knowledge, unless otherwise stated, and are true to the best of my knowledge and belief. Where I refer to information supplied by others, the source of the information is identified. Facts and matters derived from other sources are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Background

4. I am a full-time student at the University [REDACTED]. I am presently in my final year. Before the fire, I was working part-time [REDACTED].
5. My mother and I have lived at Grenfell tower for over 20 years now. I believe we moved there in 1997.

The fire on the 14th June 2017

6. On the night of the fire, I came home late from work and found the Tower engulfed in flames. As my mum was at home in the Tower I was frantic with worry and desperately tried to find her. I found her near the Kensington Leisure Centre. I took her to her friend Fatima's house. I went back to the scene of the fire to see if I could help in some way.
7. I realised my neighbour, Rosemary, may still be in her flat. I called her and I could hear her panicking so I told the firefighters her full name and address. They went up and got her out immediately. Her husband had started making a rope, to let them both down.
8. I later began looking for my friend, Mariam Elgahiry. I searched for all around the scene, including the Rugby Club, West Way, a pub opposite Latimer Road Station and hospitals in

the surrounding area. I later went to St Clements too but returned when there was no sign of Mariam.

9. I was frantically searching for people. I later went to Avondale School, where someone informed me that a teacher had died. It was however not until much later that I knew this was Nadia. I found out later that Nadia, her family and Mariam who died. I was devastated.
10. In the days, weeks and months after the fire I was completely traumatised by what I had seen and my mind started playing tricks on me. As a result, and particularly after speaking to my mum, I had become convinced that I had been in the Tower at the time of the fire and escaped with my mum. I experienced extremely vivid nightmares of the event in which I saw myself in the Tower at the time of the fire and escaping from it with my mum. As time has gone by and after receiving therapy I now know that this was not the case but at the time I honestly believed this to be true.

Impact and aftermath

11. On the 16th of June, my mother and I were moved to the Premier Inn Hotel in Hammersmith. I stayed there alone the first night. My mother was at her friend's house. I could not go to sleep. I did not sleep for two days. We were eventually moved around hotels and we were eventually offered permanent accommodation.
12. On the night, I did not feel that people were in control. I do not think that the scale of the fire dawned on anybody. It felt surreal.
13. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] I frequently suffer sleepless nights and, when I do sleep, I regularly have nightmares. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] It is additionally difficult to re-adjust to normality especially when we didn't have a permanent home for a long time. Grenfell Tower had been our home for my whole life.

The tower and fire safety

14. I grew up in the tower. My mother was active, she would attend TMO meetings but I did not. I had no contact with the council.
15. In terms of the refurbishment, I thought this was meaningless as the heating, the hot water and pipes were all fine beforehand. I believe the council refurbished the tower to make it look better, without making any substantive changes.

16. In terms of fire safety, there was one smoke alarm in the kitchen and one in the corridor. I believe there was a fire safety check up to a week before the fire. Someone had played around with these alarms either from the TMO or Rydon. The smoke alarms did not go off on the night of the fire. I later found out, having spoken to other residents that their alarms did not go off either. There were also no sprinklers. I do not however recall anybody from the London Fire Brigade doing any safety checks on the tower.
17. We had no training or induction in relation to what we should do in the event of a fire.
18. I recall that there was an explosion from the flat above, when there boiler exploded. This flooded our flat. It was in August 2015. Our flat was repaired but we believe it was a really poor job. It remained this way until the fire.
19. In terms of signs, I recall there being a fire safety warning downstairs. I did not see any other leaflets or signs about fire safety in the tower. The signs were in English only, not in any other language.
20. As regards the material that was used in our flat, we did not have a fire safety door or windows. They seemed to me to be made out of ordinary material – PVC – which is easily inflammable. Previously, we had metal-sliding doors. Following works carried out on the tower, we had plastic PVC windows which opened outwards. When the works were carried out, all the doors had been replaced with thinner PVC doors. Some residents refused to change their doors and kept the older ones. The new doors were put in only a few weeks beforehand. The new doors had three hinges. There was a gap between the door and frame. You could see the light seeping through this gap. There was no foam in-between but there was an airbrush at the bottom, with whiskers. It was soft and acted as insulation but there was still a gap.
21. There was also a letter box, which was covered internally only. There was no box however, it was just a flap. The flap would only partially open.
22. In terms of the electrical installation, there were no checks carried out on these either. We had an extractor fan in the kitchen but that was our own, we had installed it ourself. There was no fan in the bathroom, either, only a vent. If for example the windows were open, you could smell other residents' cooking.
23. In terms of sound installation, you could not really hear much from other residents. You could not hear others walking or moving. The only noise was if there was something really loud, like drilling. I remember I used to play my music really loudly but nobody ever complained.

24. In terms of the lifts, I used these frequently. They used to break down regularly and, following the refurbishment, they broke down more often. The new lifts were confusing as they added floors to the lift.
25. In terms of lighting, these were fixed outside and if there were any faults, they would be fixed within two days.

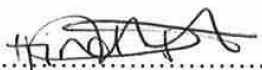
The Inquiry

26. I would like answers from the Inquiry and those giving evidence in relation to the material used in the tower. Why had non-expensive material been used to make the tower look better via the cladding? Why had so many lives been risked, simply to save some money on cheaper cladding?
27. I have evidence, by way of a letter, that the council were intending to demolish the tower in 2014. This was on RBKC's website. I do not know why these plans had been changed but I am consequently unsurprised that inexpensive material was used. They did not want the tower to be there.
28. In my view, the fire was planned, either directly or indirectly. Had this been Westminster or Knightsbridge, with white upper middle class people residing at the tower, the fire and the measures taken beforehand, would never have happened.
29. In my view, this is social cleansing. We, the residents of the tower, are all from different backgrounds and different ethnicities. They, the council and everybody else responsible for the make-up of the tower, did not care about us. We are merely numbers to them. We were evidently not worth them investing in an extra hundred pounds on better quality material.

Statement of truth

I believe the facts and matters stated in this witness statement are true.

I confirm I am willing for this statement to form part of the evidence before the Inquiry and published on the Inquiry's website.

Signed 

Dated 18/10/18