

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

Criminal Procedure Rules, r27.2; Criminal Justice Act 1967, s.9; Magistrates' Courts Act 1980, s.5b

Statement of: PEREZ, CHRISTOPHER

Age if under 18: Over 18 (if over 18 insert 'over 18')

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

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This statement (consisting of 13 page(s) each signed by me) is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I shall be liable to prosecution if I have wilfully stated in it anything which I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.

Signature: C PEREZ

Date: 15/06/2018

Tick if witness evidence is visually recorded  (supply witness details on rear)

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This is my account of the fire that occurred at GRENFELL TOWER on WEDNESDAY 14 JUNE 2017. I will mention a number of people all of whom work for the LONDON FIRE BRIGADE (LFB).

I will refer to the following in this statement, which I exhibit as:

- CAP/1 - Map of GRENFELL TOWER and surrounding area. Serial Number: MPSZ13114666
- CAP/2 - Contemporaneous notes. Serial Number: MPSZ13114668

I joined the LFB in 2004. I completed sixteen (16) weeks training at SOUTHWARK TRAINING CENTRE. This included classroom and theoretical based training. The initial training included First Aid, fitness and circuit training. This was followed by Pumps and Pumping, working at speed, carrying Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and ladders. I completed further training on Pumps and Pumping and Standard Duration Breathing Apparatus (SDBA). There was also training in Hazardous Materials and Road Traffic Accidents towards the end of the sixteen (16) weeks. There were assessments throughout, constant revising as well as exam questions from instructors. The assessments must be passed in order to progress to the next stage. If a trainee does not pass, they can be back classed but given another chance to pass the assessments. I really enjoyed my time at training. I am classed as Competent.

After completing the initial training, I was posted to MILWALL FIRE STATION. I remained there for ten (10) years. MILLWALL FIRE STATION has a Fire Rescue Unit (FRU) posted there. I put myself

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forward for the relevant FRU training course. I completed a four (4) week training course; this included specific training around rescue scenarios. I trained on SWIFT water rescue and line rescue. I am not currently up to date with the FRU qualification, as my current station, RICHMOND, does not have an FRU appliance. I may move on to a FRU station at a future point in my career. I also completed a two (2) week training course on Extended Duration Breathing Apparatus (EDBA). This equipment provides the wearer with more air than the Standard equipment (SDBA).

I completed a driving course however due to a road traffic accident whilst driving a fire appliance around five (5) or six (6) years ago, I am not currently a driver. I decided that I did not want the extra stress of driving; instead, I take part in Community Fire Safety work. I attend events, including with junior citizens, teaching the children about what to do in a house fire situation. I also explain fire safety. This can involve ten minutes with groups of ten (10) or so children. They are keen and interested and I enjoy this aspect of the role. I may go back to driving in the future.

As well as courses, I have also received training at the Fire Station. This included lectures and practical drills as well as refresher courses. We do practical drills in the yard regularly; we practice the procedures for High Rise fires. Strategic resources are taken off the run from the Station and we meet with other Fire Stations to take part in High Rise simulation exercises. These usually take place at least every quarter. I took part in a simulation at the Household Cavalry Barracks, Hyde Park three (3) months ago.

I have taken part in Familiarisations (Section 7(2)(d)s on my own ground. These are visits to a designated address at least once a year. We go as a Watch. The visits are to assess insulations, access points, fire siting points for appliances and Hydrant locations. Layouts, number of floors, number of residents and everything the Brigade need to know are noted, as if we were turning up for a job. We take a copy of the previous visits Familiarisations with us and make note of any amendments at the address. This information is returned to the Fire Station and updates are made on the computer system. I worked for the Fire Safety department for one (1) day. They carry out fire safety visits and installation of smoke alarms. High Rise visits are still part of our remit though. We visit these buildings anyway and not just as a part of the Familiarisation procedure.

I am aware of the Stay Put Policy. My interpretation of the policy is that should someone ring 999 when there is a fire, the Call Operators are trained to tell the caller to stay on the phone until Firefighters are

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dispatched and rescue them. If they are trapped in their home by smoke, the resident is told to stay in safe and clean air. Fire Survival Guidance (FSG) is where the Operator stays on phone and ask questions about the environment and what the resident is experiencing. This is then relayed to Firefighters so that the Firefighter knows where to go inside a building and to enable them to get to the residents quickly and swiftly.

I had no knowledge of GRENFELL TOWER before the fire.

On WEDNESDAY 13<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2017, I came on duty at 2000hrs for a night shift. As is usual, the role call was done. I was posted with Watch Manager (WM) and Officer in Charge (OIC) BERRY, Crew Manager (CM) FAULKNER, Firefighter FAIRBROTHER, driver of the pump, Firefighter DWYER and Firefighter WIGLEY. I was to ride in the back of the appliance with WIGLEY and DWYER. Our appliance was the MERCEDES SERIES 2.

Following the role call, I started to complete the usual checks. There are BA sets in the appliance which dependent on positioning in the appliance, it is your job to test. I made sure that there was enough air in the cylinder and that there were no defects or cracks in the back plate. The mask was also checked to ensure that the seal was tight and that it fit for my size. I also completed an A Test. The result, including the pressure, was recorded in the BA logbook that is kept in the Watch Room. Following the tests, I did a full inventory of the appliance, checking for the equipment. The appliance I was riding was equipped with 70m1 and 45m1 hose, branches, RTC and breaking in equipment as well as axes, enforcers and other tools. There are also ladders, pumps, cutting equipment and air bags for lifting up to twelve (12) tonnes.

A Thermal Imaging Camera (TIC) was also on the appliance. These are used in search and rescue and identifying hot spots. The TIC can also be used for searching for people in the River, if the area is dark and smoky or visibility is poor. The TIC gives a good outline of where you are going.

I updated the system at the Station with the inventory, took a short break, and had some food. There was then a lecture but I do not recall what the topic was. I may have watched a film, at around midnight I went to get some rest.

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Around 0130 there was a call out, the bells went down in the Station. Initially the call had come in as a twenty (20) pump fire on the call slip. As a crew, we left the Station on the appliance. OIC BERRY was aware of the route we needed to take, as he is very knowledgeable on LONDON. We crossed over the river on KEW BRIDGE and headed down the M4. I was listening to the radio messages in the appliance; it was very busy on the radio and I could hear more and more calls coming in. I heard Control tell the appliances on route where the Rendezvous Point was. I do not recall where this was. There was an Mobile Data Terminal (MDT) in the appliance but as I was in the back seats I could not see it and I had no interaction with it.

I was not aware of the area so I was not involved in the route. As we got closer to GRENFELL TOWER, I could see other Fire Appliances running to the incident on the roads parallel to us. We made our approach from the SOUTH SIDE of the Tower. I first saw the Tower while on one of the side streets. It was a shock. I knew that it was a major fire due to the number of appliances heading to the incident. The Tower was on fire. The lower 25% was not alight but the top 75% was on fire. I could only see the fire on the outside. I could not see from there if the inside was on fire. The flames were bright yellow, very dense looking and a very rich flame. The fire was very well developed. I could see one (1) corner of the Tower, I thought it was the SOUTH side then but I now know it was the EAST side. The SOUTH side was not as damaged as the EAST at that point.

I just wanted to get in there, I wanted to help. The appliance parked in front of the LEISURE CENTRE and I got out there at the base of the Tower. There was a patch of grass to the EAST of the Tower. There were about eight (8) or nine (9) appliances parked up and around forty (40) to fifty (50) people milling around. We all got off, but I grabbed Firefighter DWYER, my BA set and the TIC. We headed straight to the SOUTH side entrance next to the SURGERY. I do not know what the rest of the crew did.

DWYER and I got to the entrance, we were then held there outside the glass lobby area at the bottom of the Tower. There was a crowd of Firefighters with BA on being held back by the main entrance of the Tower. We then made our way through to the GROUND FLOOR lobby inside the Tower. Once inside, we were held for a few minutes. Inside, there was a Ground Floor and a Mezzanine level with a stairwell going up.

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A Watch Manager (WM) from FULHAM was inside and writing blocks of five (5) gates on the WEST wall. The WM was ticking off casualties coming out. I went passed him and on into the GROUND FLOOR lobby.

There was a Crew Manager on the stairs who disappeared out of sight when he went up the stairs. The CM came back with a Black Woman who was about five eleven (5,11) to six (6) foot tall, she had a large afro and was in her early twenties (20s). The CM was lifting her by holding under her arms. She was unconscious. I could see black smoke marks around her nose and mouth. I thought to myself this is how it will be, with casualties coming out one after another. I shouted for people to help or move out of the way. People started to help him carry her down the stairs.

I was still stood with DWYER, I had the TIC and there was a crew of two (2) from CHISWICK in front of us. I started to follow them up the stairs to the third (3<sup>rd</sup>) floor. The stairwell was a standard zig zag design. It was small and quite narrow with concrete walls and stairs. I was not in the stairwell long. As we got to the third (3<sup>rd</sup>) floor, we found the BRIDGEHEAD. There was a lift lobby area, packed full of personnel. It looked like a trading floor with numbers and writing on the walls. There were several BA boards being used.

An [REDACTED] WM, O KEEFFE from KENSINGTON said to us "You're fresh, wait there". He gave us a briefing to search some flats but someone else shouted that those flats had already been searched. O KEEFFE was doing a great job despite the changing scenario. I did not know who the overall Incident Commander was. The Entry Control were updating each other constantly about when BA wearers were rescuing people and relaying that information to others. The [REDACTED] WM gave us another briefing. This time he told us "Go to the tenth (10<sup>th</sup>) floor, flat seventy-four (74), and go there as there are people in there". The WM would have been specific as it would have been a FSG call detailing the number of people in the flat but I do not recall the number he said.

I tried to familiarise myself with the layout of the third (3<sup>rd</sup>) floor as I knew this would help when we moved up the Tower. I looked around and saw two (2) recess areas at the end of the lift lobby area.

The WM said to us "You'll be OK". DWYER and I left the Bridgehead; I had the TIC and enforcer with me. DWYER had a length of hose. Once in the stairwell, we went under air. By the fourth (4<sup>th</sup>) it was

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smoke logged. I could not see in front of my face. We made our way up to the tenth (10<sup>th</sup>) floor. I counted off the floors, as I could not see any floor numbers. I stopped and wiped the walls and I used the TIC to look for any numbering but I could not find any. I felt my way on each change of level. There was hose and equipment in the stairwell, I could not see so I kept tripping up.

I could hear crying, it was faint and I did not know where it was coming from. As I got to the tenth (10<sup>th</sup>) floor, I heard spluttering and crying. There was thick smoke. I went towards the sound. I found a door to the lobby of area. I heard crying, coughing and shouting for help from behind us. I turned around and started to use the TIC. I could not see anything until I was almost on top of a woman. I dropped the enforcer when I found a woman. I kept shouting to the woman to keep shouting back to me. I think I found her in between the tenth (10<sup>th</sup>) and eleventh (11<sup>th</sup>) floor.

When I got to her, she told me that her dad was still in flat 122 on the fifteenth (15<sup>th</sup>) floor. I told her that crews were coming but we needed to get her down. She told me she could not breathe and she was coughing. I told her to keep her mouth covered, she had a blanket or something similar with her that she used. She was complaining of not being able to breath and that her throat hurt. She was Caucasian, with brunette hair. She was mid to late twenties (20s) and around five foot seven (5' &)to five foot eight. She was wearing pyjamas.

DWYER had his radio with him, he messaged back to Entry Control and relayed that we had found a woman and about the father being in a flat. He gave Entry Control the flat details. I thought about giving my mask to the woman so that she could get some air, but I did not. I knew that would have taken valuable time and I just wanted to get her down. DWYER was in front, as I ran with her. I had my arm on the railings of the stairwell and her arm over me.

On the way down it seemed to take a long time. I had most of her weight on me and I was running. I knew that she was suffocating, I told DWYER to run faster. The woman stayed conscious. I kept talking to her. I was trying to reassure her that we would find her father and that she would be OK. I told her that a crew would be going to look for her father.

We got to the third (3<sup>rd</sup>) floor; I passed the woman to a CM who passed her to a Firefighter not in BA. We

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told Entry Control about her father. We also told them that we had not been able to fulfil our brief and that another crew would need to go there. I turned around and went back up a few flights of stairs. I found a family of three (3) in the stairwell. There was a female, a male and a female toddler. The male had tied the toddler to him with a blanket. I led them down to the third (3<sup>rd</sup>) floor. I took the toddler; she was conscious and breathing but coughing. I passed her to crews nearby.

I checked my levels and saw that I had only two (2) minutes of air left before the whistle. DWYER said we should not go back up, as we would run out of air. I wanted to go back in. We collected our tallies from the Entry Control and were directed to the NORTH side. We made our way to the lobby area. There were still BA crews waiting. I saw WM from FULHAM who said that his wife was in labour. Another person took over from him. A broken window was being used to pass casualties through to outside. There was a chain of people in place to pass casualties along and away from the Tower.

DWYER and I continued out of the Tower. There was a children's play and a ramp. Underneath the ramp were fire appliances. There were crews on the left hand side up against a wall. We stayed underneath the ramp. We came across our appliance H421, it was parked up. It had been moved from where we had left it on arrival. The appliance was being used as the base pump set into the dry riser. I did not see anyone jump from the building.

We took our BA sets off. This is marked on Exhibit CAP/1. I looked back at the Tower as I was walking away. I could see that the Tower stood out as a High Rise amongst other low-rise blocks. It seemed like a very tall tower. It was engulfed in flames. There were bits of the building falling off and coming down. I shouted at a WM to move when I saw debris falling from above. The building itself was rectangular and flat roofed. The fire looked weird, like nothing I had ever seen before. Usually flames punch out the windows. It will breach the windows and then other floors. This fire however was like a match. I could not tell how much of the Tower was on fire inside, I knew that when I had been inside it had been warm but I had not seen any flames inside.

I left my BA set at my appliance, H421. I went back to help carry casualties out from the SOUTHWEST corner. There was a steady flow of casualties coming out of the Tower. I helped carry between five (5) and ten (10). I carried a young girl, she was about six (6) years old, Caucasian with mousy blonde hair,

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she was slim and was wearing pyjamas. I took her from another Firefighter. She was unconscious. I took my gloves off and lay her down on a salvage sheet next to H421. I was going to start compressions. I told DWYER to get the Defib ready. Another Firefighter, called WAYNE from another Fire Station told us that there were LONDON AMBULANCE SERVICE (LAS) paramedics by LATIMER ROAD STATION (marked on Exhibit CAP/1) and that we should take her there.

She had a weak pulse, DWYER and WAYNE ran with her to the LAS. I ran with them. We got to the paramedics who took her and immediately started using a Defib and doing compressions. I lay next to her looking for signs of life and tried to help. The paramedics scooped her up and put her on the Ambulance.

I made my way back to the Tower. I felt dizzy and had to sit down for twenty (20) to thirty (30) seconds. I regained some exposure and went back to the casualties that were being passed out of the Tower. I saw people from the Tower sat down, with black around their mouths. I saw the woman that I had rescued earlier. It looked like a scene from a film. Police were holding back civilians from trying to get back into the Tower. The LAS and Police were doing a great job.

There were members of the public coming up the ramp; they were trying to get inside the Tower. Some were getting aggressive with the Police. Firefighters were speaking to the public, asking them to let us do our job. Some of the public were showing us phone footage of people inside the Tower, up at the windows. We relayed this information back to a Station Manager. It was like a war film, flames were coming down like molten.

I went back to the casualty chain. OIC BERRY from RICHMOND was in charge of that sector. I could see that the cladding on the outside of the Tower was coming down. There were huge flaming sheets falling down. It felt like a blur. Police Officers with riot shields were protecting people going in and out of the Tower. I helped two (2) SOUTH EAST ASIAN females and another male to the LAS area. The casualties were coming out; it felt like it was non-stop. I saw WM BERRY carry a couple of children.

I took people from Firefighters at the Tower. There were BA crews nearby and a pathway near the playground. The casualties were being passed through the broken window in the lobby. The window was about two feet wide. It was very narrow and passing the casualty was difficult. It was about twenty (20) to

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twenty five (25) metres there and back to LAS. BA crews had brought down the casualties from the Tower.

After the flow of casualties quietened down, I wanted to help with something else. I was told to change a length of hose that had been burst and damaged by flaming molten debris. I knew that this had happened a lot. I waited by the hose. I was told to change delivery next to the Children's playground. DWYER went to the playground and used a 45ml jet hose; he used the climbing frame for cover. There was some confusion as to whether or not the water could be turned off. After I changed hose, I headed back to the main lobby area.

I saw a Firefighter I knew, Chris CHEESEMAN from EUSTON. He was well and truly exhausted. He and his crew had carried a few children down from the Tower. I knew him so it was good to see a familiar face. I took him to the LAS area; I did not see him again.

I felt so frustrated that this was happening. I felt helpless. We were all working so hard and the adrenaline was so high. I did not have many thoughts, just to get people out. I was upset that children were coming out and their brothers and sisters had died next to them.

I could see there was debris all around the fire ground. There was hose going into the SOUTHWEST corner. The debris got worse as the night went on. By now BA wearers were backed up outside, they were sat in a recess area, (CAP/1). More appliances had arrived. There were casualties sat on walls by trees and posts (CAP/1). It was chaos but people were working hard.

I saw that there were BA wearers still ousted the Tower that had not been used. I assumed that they would not need me again as they had so many other wearers yet to go inside. I went back to the Ground Floor lobby. I was waiting for more casualties to come out but there did not seem to be any more. While I was there, I saw that there were Firefighters there who had previously worn and were being sent back inside. I spoke to a WANDSWORTH crew. I asked them if they had been inside and they said they had, three (3) times. I said to them that there were fresh people outside. I ran and got my BA set from the appliance, where I had left it after the first wear. I changed the cylinder and did a Fire ground A Test. I then walked back to the lobby area with the intention of going back in.

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By now it was around 0400 or 0500hrs. I was on my own; I met up with another lone Firefighter from BRIXTON REDWATCH. I met him in the Lobby. When I entered the Tower, the Bridgehead and Entry Control were now on the GROUND FLOOR. It was not as mad or as hectic as it had been. I recall that the Commissioner of the LFB was inside the lobby. I do not recall who briefed us, but we were briefed straight away. We were told to go to the fifth (5<sup>th</sup>) floor to take over from crews that were already there. We were to firefight.

We went under air straight away; this time around, it was like a different job. It was starting to become daylight outside. The stairwell was like a water park. There was at least a foot of water on the Ground Floor. The fire was going up through the building through the floors. I recall the layout of the flats and the pockets of flames. I wanted to go up to higher floors, but we had been given a brief and we had to stick to it.

The fifth (5<sup>th</sup>) floor looked like a typical burnout flat, similar to what you would see in a normal house fire. Material had melted and were now melded together. There was still smoke but it was clearer than it had been. We started to turn over debris and dampening down any hot spots. I had the TIC with me; I used it to find any hot spots. I felt very drained, it was a struggle to hold the hose, I was physically exhausted but I wanted to go up and do more. Unless you come across a casualty, you have to stick to your brief.

We worked on the fifth (5<sup>th</sup>) floor for about fifteen (15) minutes. We did not use the dry riser; I used the hose that was already set up. This was coming from the lift lobby area. I did not trace it back to the dry riser at any point. I checked my air and saw that it was low. We started to make our way back to the ground floor, going back down the stairs. We reported to Entry Control. I felt numb; it was so surreal and looked like the aftermath in the lobby.

While I was outside of the Tower, stood at the appliance, I saw what I thought was the Gas Main alight. I could see blue flames of gas going up the SOUTH WEST corner of the Tower. I looked at the Tower. Most of the fire was out but there were some flames still on the top. It was smouldering but not much. I knew that there were still crews inside. I did not go back in, as I was exhausted. I did check to see if there

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was anything else, I could do.

SM HUMPHRIES tasked me with counting BA wearers. The BA wearers looked annoyed and were all keen to get inside. They were pacing and walking up and down. The BA wearers were in a room by the lifts on the Ground Floor of the Tower. The crews who were waiting to be committed were in the actual Lobby.

I came back to the Tower. It was very subdued. A BOROUGH COMMANDER tasked me to take equipment up to the twelfth (12<sup>th</sup>) floor. The stairwell had no smoke in it. I could see that the stairwell was full of equipment, hoses and water. I saw a dead body on or around the fifth (5<sup>th</sup>) floor. It was a large black female. I took the equipment up, including two (2) lengths of 45ml hose, branches and dividing breach. I dropped it where I could before it got smoky. There were four (4) or five (5) Firefighters doing this job together.

After the equipment had been dropped to the twelfth (12<sup>th</sup>) floor, I made my way back down and out of the Tower. I had not eaten or had anything to drink since I had left RICHMOND. I went outside of the Tower. Someone had brought a box of Mars Bars and Coke to the fire ground. I sat and had a snack. This was the first time that I had stopped.

I saw a Chinese male being brought out, I believe that he was the last live casualty to be brought out.

I went back to the appliance; it was still connected to the Tower. There was no equipment left on the appliance. At around 1030 or 1100hrs, I walked around to the LEISURE CENTRE carrying my BA set. Journalists were trying to talk to me, I kept saying "No". There were people offering food and drink. I saw helicopters above. I was numb, reality started to kick in. Blue watch crews were coming to relieve crews on site.

My crew were taken by minibus to PADDINGTON. We were one (1) of the last crews to leave, as our appliance had been so close to the Tower. At PADDINGTON, there were already crews there. I was tired and hungry but we were asked to write a statement in a given amount of time. We were all offered counselling there, as a group and individually. We all took it, and had about five (5) minutes with a

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counsellor.

I sat in the yard at PADDINGTON. It was hot and sunny. I just wanted to go to sleep. Around 1300 or 1400hrs, I had a sandwich and some crisps. Then a minibus took us back to RICHMOND arriving at 1630hrs. I slept briefly at the Station. I came back on duty at 2200 or 2300hrs. We had been told that we could have the night off. We did not have a Fire Engine. We remained at the Station for the shift.

On the night of the fire, I was not aware of when the Stay Put policy was withdrawn. I did not have my own radio with me, but Communications did work, as DWYER was able to use his radio inside the Tower. There was heavy radio traffic. I saw no sprinklers inside the Tower; I may have heard individual alarms. I was not aware of Officers watching fire spread on the outside of the Tower as this was not relevant to my role at the time.

In my experience, I have never seen fire behave the way it did at GRENFELL TOWER. The Firefighters could have been assisted by carrying equipment that casualties could wear while being rescued. For example, a breathing mask or spare smoke hood that is carried on our own sets. This should be available in all High Rise buildings.

The lack of numbering on each floor and the fact that we could not see hampered us. Firefighters should be issued with some sort of fluorescent numbering that can be carried and placed on the relevant floor. The first fire crews in attendance could do this so that following crews do not have to waste time trying to work out the floor number. There should be a similar system to show that the floor has been checked already.

I twisted my ankle and dropped the enforcer when I made my way up the Tower. I nearly hit another Firefighter in the face. I struggled to hold my hands over my head for days after the fire and my back has not been the same since. I have been in contact with a physiotherapist. [REDACTED]

I spoke to members of the public face to face, at points people were telling us that they had family

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members inside the Tower. I was not involved in relaying this information to any other Firefighters. I did not speak to anyone on the phone.

I wrote my notes directly after the incident without any respite and refreshments. There may be some errors in my notes, I have corrected these in my statement.

I would like to know how it was possible for this incident to happen and how it came to be. Were there shortcuts taken in the architecture and construction? I feel furious that this has happened and it takes people to die to be rectified. I will never forget GRENFELL TOWER. It has made me very angry and I have received counselling since the incident. I am proud to say that I worked along the people I did that night.

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