

IN THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF MS FERUZA AFEWERKI

1. My name is Feruza Afewerki of [REDACTED].
2. Amal Ahmedin, her husband Mohammednur Tuccu, their 3 year old daughter [REDACTED] and Amal's cousin Amna, died in the fire at Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017. Amal lived in Grenfell Tower for 11 months on the 19th floor of the Tower. Amna often stayed with Amal or with Afewerki, my father.
3. The facts set out in this statement are from my own direct knowledge. Insofar as the matters to which I refer are within my knowledge, they are true; insofar as they are not within my direct knowledge, they are true to the best of my knowledge, information and belief.
4. I often visited my sister for birthdays and other celebrations. She always had people over at her house. She was a people person and very popular. I loved her deeply. My niece was a bundle of joy. Amal gave her the best she could.
5. Before Grenfell Tower she, Mohammednur and [REDACTED] lived in Ladbroke Grove in a posh area. They wanted to move to have more space. I remember that she was applying to the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (the 'Council') for ages for a new place.
6. The Council said that Grenfell Tower was the last option available to them. They were told that if they did not take the property they would have to go private and would receive no further support from the Council.
7. Amal said to me that she was not sure whether to accept the flat. I believed whatever she decided she was doing the best thing for [REDACTED].

8. When they got there Amal completely renovated the place. When she was done with it, it did not look like a tower bloc anymore. It was so stylish and luxurious inside. They painted [REDACTED] room beautifully. I always admired her style. She was glamorous. She worked in Selfridges and so she always had the latest clothes and knew the latest fashions.
9. I recall that Mohammednur said to my sister the fire safety was not up to scratch in the building. I thought that if there was a fire it would never have been catastrophic. It never even crossed my mind that something like this would ever happen. Particularly in the wealthiest borough in London. You would think there would be standards for these kinds of things, to stop them from happening.
10. I know, though, for sure, that Mohammednur was aware of fire safety problems in advance. He was aware of concerns being raised by fellow residents about the materials that had been used in the recent refurbishment of the block. He mentioned his concern that the materials were not fireproof. They were not to my knowledge ever given any information about fire precautions, or what to do in the event of a fire.
11. They brought these concerns up with me and asked what they should do. I did not know. I did not look into it as I did not think it would ever be an issue. I was just concerned that [REDACTED] would have her own room and more space for the family.
12. I know also that they were worried about being so high up.
13. At the time of the fire I was in Jerusalem on a trip with friends. On the second to last day of the trip I was in a coach when someone at the beginning of the day went to the front of the coach to share a thought for the day and some warm words. They explained that there had been a fire in Notting Hill Gate. I grabbed my phone immediately and panicked. I did not think, though, that it was my sister's place as they lived elsewhere. I could not get any more information on the internet either.

14. Some time after I saw 'Grenfell' mentioned on the internet and I screamed. I telephoned Amal immediately but it went straight to voicemail. Those few hours afterwards are a blur. It was horrible. I felt so powerless. My dad called me. He said that as we do not know anything we should not worry yet. He could not say it was okay however. I tried to convince myself that she had run out, and was okay. I said it to myself over and over. I said she is a fighter and she does not let anything get in her way. She was invincible. I thought she is probably in hospital. I could not imagine her being dead.
15. I continued with the tour. It was strange. It was like I was not even there. I felt numb. I telephoned the hospitals in the area but none of them had a clue.
16. I booked a ticket to return home. No one told me or anyone in the family what was going on. When I came home Winta, my sister, came to pick me up. As I approached I thought to myself 'why does she look like that'. She tried to hold me. I saw people mourning. I saw my auntie. I fell to the ground. It was awful.
17. In Eritrean tradition we have three days of mourning. There was a lot to deal with. A lot of people were at our house. I did not want to see them or be with anyone. I held onto my faith – that they were in a better place. I was numb. I passed out outside. I was just in shock.
18. We did not see the police for at least a week. They came to our house but they could not give us much information.
19. The hospitals did not tell us what was going on. It was so frustrating not to be able to get any information from anyone. We heard nothing from the Council.
20. I did not go to the Tower until the memorial events.
21. [REDACTED] We are all trying to make sense of what happened. I do not think we can still believe it has happened.

22. I believe the way the Council has managed the whole thing, and dealt with former residents and families has been very undignified. I feel like the Council now believe it is all done and dusted and they have returned to treating the residents with contempt.
23. We have been provided with an FLO and Key worker. Sometimes they have been helpful but often not. It took us 6 months to obtain their bodies. They would not confirm to us if they were actually dead which was very difficult for us. They have always just dragged their feet.
24. I cannot prevent my mind going to places that I do not want it to go or thinking that this must have happened for particular reasons. I am aware that a large proportion of the residents were Muslim and their traditions and deeply held ways of mourning have been ignored and the disorganised and slow response to this tragedy has been heart breaking.
25. Theresa May the Prime Minister promised to house everyone by now but yet so many still remain in hotels. It is abhorrent. Valuing profits over human life has been a recurrent travesty in this whole tragedy.
26. I do not think this situation would have arisen had the majority of the residents been white or wealthy. That, I think, is indisputable.
27. It feels at present like those that are running the Council, or those forces, are also running the inquiry and so I am naturally distrustful of the Inquiry.

DATED this 21st day of May 2018

Signed 