

IN THE MATTER OF THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

STATEMENT OF MAHER KHOUDAIR

Preamble

1. This statement is made 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. In this statement I focus upon my background - living on the Grenfell Tower estate and most particularly, the events of 14 June 2017. I also wish to provide evidence to the Inquiry regarding the failures of the authorities in their response to the disaster. I will provide a further statement regarding those aspects when the Inquiry make a call for this evidence. In the event that the Inquiry seeks oral evidence from me in relation to both phases of the Inquiry; I have no objection to giving evidence on more than one occasion. I did provide a statement to the police. I did not make a 999 call as the emergency services were already there. I kept saying 'No' to media interviews but then I spoke to ITN News. I do not have any videoclips as I have deleted them.
3. I make this statement because I was a resident of Grenfell Tower. My family lost everything as a result of the fire.

Personal Background

4. I was born on [REDACTED]. I am now 53 years old.
5. I have 3 daughters:
 - a) Walaa (D.O.B [REDACTED]) who is now 27
 - b) Rowan (D.O.B [REDACTED]) who is now 24
 - c) [REDACTED] who is now 17

I

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Dated:

18.05.2018

6. As I make this statement in April 2018, my daughter Rawan and Walaa are still living in temporary accommodation.

Medical History

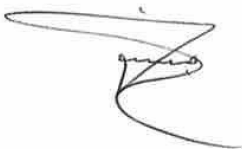
My medical history is that from 5 years old I have polio in both my legs. Since an operation on my knees in 2009, I have had to use crutches. Before this I didn't need crutches to walk. Since 2009 I always had to use crutches. Over time legs have got worse so even have to use crutches inside the flat.⁷

64 Grenfell Tower

7. I moved into this flat in 2013 (4 and a half years ago). The flat was on the 9th floor. 'TMO' was in charge of looking after building and they gave the housing. I applied for housing through council first. Then TMO look after the housing. I was not happy as there was work going on all the time. All the residents were complaining, but I liked the flat and the view. The lift was always busy because Raydon workers used it all the time. There was a notice to say lifts won't be working on some weekends or only one lift is working. The flat had one bedroom which you came to as you entered the front door. The kitchen was next to the bedroom and living room next to kitchen was separate. From the window from my flat, there is only one side, I can see the tube station, Latimer Road Station, Wembley Stadium, three high buildings and Shepherds Bush Train and A40 and also Westfield. My front door it has a wooden door. It was not self-closed. I had to close it myself. I would pull shut from outside. From inside pull handle up to lock it. There was only one lock on the front door.
8. On my floor there are 5 other flats. A place to put rubbish as well. So six flats in total. I never used the stairs until the night of the fire. The internal doors in my flat were wooden which I would have to shut myself.
9. The pipes went round the whole flat I only used electric in the flat. The pipes were all round the flat near the top of the ceiling and all the way down.
10. The gas was supplied by British gas. The gas was provided by pipes, they even included behind the back of my bed in my bedroom. The boiler was on the left hand

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side, next to the entrance door. We asked if they could put somewhere else but they said 'if we didn't put it there we wouldn't get hot water.

11. There were gaps between the bedroom and kitchen and bathroom and also pipes were in the communal area that led into my flat. This was opposite the lift. My flat was left of the lift. My neighbours flat was next to mine. The lift is to the right of my flat and my neighbours flat is to the left. There were gaps inside the flat, in the wall with the piping outside the flat they covered the gaps. The holes for the pipes were covered but not completely covered. Some of the pipes were lower down on the walls. I asked my wife, daughters, not to touch the pipes or boiler as it is dangerous.

Communal area

There were no sprinklers, no fire extinguishers in the tower. There is some sort of fire alarm at the bottom. There also cameras in the lift area and floor. I did not see fire signs anywhere. I have never heard any fire alarms go off in other flats.

Building Works

Communal Entrance door

The front door had a touch key. It was a glass key. This had once fallen, so had a touch key to open and also touch key for second door. I had to use a bridge/walkway by Grenfell tower from 1-3 floor, because they were doing work inside. Once finished the entrance would be opened up. I made a complaint as the bridge was too hard for me to use especially on crutches and if it is raining. The walkway had a touch key door too. The man from TMO said wait three weeks and the new front door would be fixed. But it took over a month.

Windows

I remember the windows only had a small gap after they were changed there was a gap. They used to slide open, made of metal I think and used to be single glazed. The window was changed to make it warm in the winter and cold in summer. That's what was said when I asked why they changed window. It was silver plastic covering, inside there was spongy material, silver lining and the plastic cover on top. This was all the way round each window.

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There was a bigger gap now. The windowsill was big enough to sit on. The windows were very wide across in the bedroom and living room. The biggest window was in the kitchen. I didn't open the windows as it was dangerous. I told my carer not to clean the windows from outside as too dangerous. This was the only window in the kitchen that was not cleaned as it was too big. I saw them doing the work they were called Rydon. Rydon were doing work outside, all the material was the same outside. They were putting cladding outside the whole building, using a window crane. Also inside they changed all my radiators, gave new radiators. There was also a fan, electric, in the kitchen. I press it twice to turn it on and it would stay on a few minutes and turn off. The kitchen fan was something new. This was not there before the changes.

We asked Rydon when they would finish. They said September and then they said, 'oh next year in September'. They were doing the work for three years.

Complaints

There were eighty complaints from all residents for the work Rydon did. How they used the lift from 1st to second floor, they would put their materials in the lift. We invited to the building Victoria Bawick our MP at the time. We met her next to Grenfell Tower. We explained to her about our suffering and the landlord of the building TMO. The council asked TMO, the landlord to help us. They did nothing to help. There also used to be security as TMO signed a paper to say we need security to stay in the building but they didn't stay and after this homeless people were sleeping in the block. This didn't happen when we had security. Homeless people were sleeping in the rubbish area in some of the floors. I made a complaint to TMO about this. There also used to be messy drug use on the stairway. We could smell the hash.

13 June 2017

12. It was Ramadan, so we went to bed early about 10.30pm.

14 June First Awareness

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13. At about 1.15am my eldest daughter Walaa knocked on my bedroom door. She said, 'The fire is building'. I thought she was wrong. She had already put her clothes on to move. My other two daughters were already dressed. I asked them to wait as I wanted to check myself to see if they were right. I opened the bedroom door and next to my right side, I saw a pipe where technicians do work where the stop cock is. I saw a bit of smoke. These were gas pipes I think. One pipe went from the bathroom to the kitchen and one went to the bedroom. The boiler is on the left hand side.
14. There were two smoke alarms, but none worked. One was in the kitchen, and one in the hallway. At no time were any of these alarms tested. We didn't hear anything. Our neighbours flat had smoke alarms, but they didn't work. They never tested it. We were lucky that my daughter woke up.

First Observation of the Fire

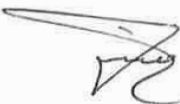
15. I opened the front door and I saw smoke in the top part of the ceiling. It was coming from a hole where the pipes outside my flat, next to my front door. There is some kind of cupboard where these pipes are. This is where the smoke is coming from. I don't know what these pipes are for. These pipes go into my flat. There are three holes for the pipes. The cupboard is near the lifts. I shut the front door and told the children to go back to bed. My youngest child [REDACTED] touched the wall and said it was hot. My kids slept in the living room on bunk beds, as the flat was too small, so they had to sleep in the living room.

How the fire spread

16. My daughter Rawan then saw debris falling down outside. Rawan said that 'it was like balls of fire'. I straight away told everyone to leave as I was worried that the debris would just kill us all.
17. When I then opened the front door, there were black flumes like a black cloud descending. It was a heavy black smoke and tasted like a plastic or wooden smell. Based on the fire and smoke picture descriptor shown to me, I would say it was B, the smoke had formed a thin layer up at the ceiling, but well above head height. This all

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happened within 5 minutes. I asked my wife to go with my kids, but she refused as she wanted to go down with me as I am on crutches and need help. I said to my wife 'Go with your kids'. I left with the kids and my wife checked to see if the lift was working but it was out of service. My front door did not shut automatically, my wife shut the door, she left before me. I knew I would have to use the stairs with my crutches but luckily there was no smoke on the stairs at that time. There was a plastic burning smell all the way down the staircase. The fire door I opened on my floor and it shut behind me. I heard a fire alarm as I was walking down the stairs, not outside the flat, it was quiet. I don't think it was on in the building, but one of the firefighters had used inside the building. I couldn't use the lift due to the fire. I had used it earlier in the day and it was working.

18. I saw people running to the exit it was trauma. I remember a philopeno man with his child, so I gave him space. It took me a long time to get down maybe 15 – 20 minutes and people were pushing past me. No one helped me. I was sitting on the stairs to rest before carrying on. I made sure my back was away from the stair rail so people could get past and not push me. Coming down the stairs and thinking, 'I am going to be pushed and fall head first on the stairs and be trampled on'. I am thinking 'this is it, my life's over'. It is dark but I can hear footsteps and the sound of a low alarm. I see a sign, saying the lift is broken. I am not sure where the fire is coming from, upstairs or downstairs. I don't remember what is happening when I am coming down the stairs, but I can smell burning plastic. So many people said they saw me on the stairs, but I don't remember. I didn't see firemen or police on the stairs only in the entrance. No one knocked on my door. No firefighters came to my flat. I had to wait to get on the stairs, as people were in front of me, so I had to take it easy. The staircase is very narrow because I was on crutches. I gave space for people to pass. It was noisy as I got down to the floor, voices from police and firefighters. It was hot going down the stairs.
19. When I got down to the entrance of the Tower, I saw a firefighter in the entrance in the tower, and he said, 'do you need any help'? but I said I was ok. I saw the firefighter looking scared as I got down from the building. I don't feel anything, but I am starting to think that people are in trouble. I did not see anyone outside the building only other

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children. There was no smoke in the entrance area. I didn't see any ventilation fans in the entrance area at all. I left the building at 1.45am.

20. Once I got out of the building he told me to go to the right of the building due to the fire. The assembly point was on the other side. The policeman said, 'this way turn right'. I saw my wife crying as she thought something had happened as I spent a long time to get down. The fire was coming from the left hand side of the building. The fire started round the other side of the tower from my flat. The firefighter said try and go to the right. I could see the building on fire. I saw the firefighters trying to put the fire out, outside but then it would come back. As soon as the firefighters turned the hose off, the fire would come back in the same place. The hose they had didn't reach the highest levels only ninth or 10th floors. I told ITV news that the firefighters didn't do a good job. Did not see a crane, maybe they use it, but I did not see. The firefighters were in shock. The police were in shock. The police shouting 'go back'. I didn't see if there were any ladders that the firefighters had. I didn't see any different colour flame. The flames started from the bottom of the tower up to the top of the tower. The fire went round the side of the building and spread round from the left of the building to the right side. I saw it spread round. I was there for 10 minutes it was all burnt across the top of the floor. I saw the fire in one line on one side, two sides looked okay. It was one line near the corner where the fire was to the top. I saw heavy smoke outside the building. I could see smoke going up the building and fire. It was difficult to breathe with the smoke. I saw flats being burned down. I could see these things falling from the building, plastic pieces. I could see one lady on the 22nd floor, she was switching her light on and off. My daughter told the police to help them. The fireman was on the floor with water pipe trying to put this line out. There was a helicopter going around at the top. That was the only lady I saw. I saw other lights in the flat on. I think she will be scared. I can hear the helicopters and think they are there to save people. I am scared and anxious and I can smell the fire. I am thinking, this is so scary for her, but she will be saved.
21. I felt sad that the firefighters could not control the fire, later I was disappointed. But they did help a lot of people, it is estimated that they helped more than 180 people get

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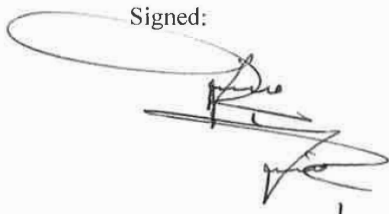
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out. They were doing their best and they helped a lot. The plastic smell was stronger once I left the building. This was between 1.30am and 1.45am.

22. I then saw a Turkish family and they were crying and saying, 'we lost our dad'. He was an old man. I am sorry for them and think he must have had a heart attack from the shock. I feel sad and frightened, but I am glad that my family are safe. My family hugged me and we were crying. The police told me to go back to the leisure centre as the fire was still very strong. I don't remember seeing fire engines as I was on the Leisure centre side. That is closed off for vehicles.
23. They then closed the area and asked who lived in the block. They told us there would be buses to take us to a temporary place. I then saw my friend Eddie crying as he witnessed his flat burning down. I asked why he was crying, he said, 'my flat is gone'.
24. We waited about two to three hours for a bus, but none came it was a long walk away from the tower. Someone came about 7am, while we were waiting for the bus, he said 'Oh guys, we have churches open or you can go to the Rugby Portobello Centre off Wilmer Road'. So, we went to the church nearby and stayed there until 5pm that evening.
25. People started to bring food, sandwiches, water. No one wanted to eat as they were tired, and angry. The children didn't want to eat either as they were scared and tired.
26. I was still in my pyjamas. Then at 3pm a social worker came to me and said, 'she had spoken to the council to find a place for me'.
27. My wife went to the hospital as [REDACTED], my youngest daughter was bleeding from her nose. The ambulance was already there. I was told to take her to the hospital. [REDACTED]'s nose bleeds every other day even now. The doctor gave her nose drops but it hasn't helped.
28. At around 6.30pm, I met my wife and daughter in Latimer Road and we went to the Copthorne Tara hotel in Kensington with my other two daughters. I asked my friend to bring food and money to the hotel. My friend came from Latimer Road Station less than half an hour later and said, 'Your flat is gone'. I couldn't believe it. But he says he had seen it from Latimer Road Station. My wife falls on the floor and my daughters are trying to comfort her. It is cold and my back is hurting. I feel scared, sad and anxious. I

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am thinking 'we have no place to go and no place to live. The shock will make my wife's [REDACTED] come back.

29. We have now been rehoused in a two bedroom flat. My wife is still taking [REDACTED] medication and was asked to go to St Mary's Hospital every 6 months [REDACTED] My neighbour who lives opposite me now lost her husband and his ashes were given to her in a box. I have been traumatised by what happened that day and continue to experience flashbacks and nightmares of that tragic day.

Statement of Truth

I confirm that the content of this witness statement is 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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