

The Grenfell Fire: Vigil held for five-year-old victim

Robert Stevens
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Family and friends as well as local residents gathered to mourn five-year-old Isaac Paulos at Notting Hill Methodist Church in west London on Sunday. Isaac was one of the youngest victims of the June 14 Grenfell Tower fire.

During the vigil, those attending lit candles and said prayers, with children letting balloons go into the sky in memory of Isaac.

Isaac lived with his family on Grenfell's 18th floor and was found dead on the 13th floor. He and his family had managed to escape their flat and make it down five flights of stairs, before Isaac was overcome by toxic fumes. His father, Paulos Petakle, and mother, Genet Shawo, along with his three-year-old brother, Lukas, were able to escape.

According to the coroner's report, Isaac could be identified only by his dental records, with the preliminary cause of death recorded as inhalation of toxic fire fumes. Many died in this way, as the external cladding on the building—which was the main factor in the fire spreading so rapidly—also emitted vast quantities of hydrogen cyanide.

Isaac's funeral was held on July 14 at St. Phillip's Church in Battersea, on the same day as that of one of the oldest victims of the fire, Ali Jafari.

World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke to some of those who attended the vigil for Isaac.

Jim is a 21-year-old student. He said, "I feel pain, and the whole community is traumatised by this. I am part of the neighbourhood, but luckily none of my family and friends were victims of the fire."

He said that the local Kensington and Chelsea Council had done nothing to support the victims: "There has not been any support from the council for this vigil either. We paid for everything ourselves. It is a trauma that will stay with us a long time. We don't

get counselling either. The council did not even send a wreath of flowers for this young child, an innocent victim of the fire. It is disgusting."

Azeem is a local resident who since the fire has been assisting as a volunteer to help those affected. He said, "I am very saddened by the loss of life of children from our community. There was no chance they could escape the blaze in the tower."

Azeem was angry about the lack of support from the council and the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation, which ran Grenfell Tower on behalf of the council. He said, "The council and the TMO don't even bother to attend the vigils for the dead and their families."

Johnny Regasa, a resident from a nearby housing estate on St. Anns Road, drove to Grenfell Tower and helped rescue and assist people on the night of the fire. He gave some of the survivors bottles of water he had brought in his car and helped to rescue and comfort Isaac's parents and Lukas once they had finally reached the ground floor. Regasa wanted to save one of his friends, Hashim Kadir, who lived on the 22nd floor of the 24-floor tower, who had perished.

Regasa said he helped a number of people escaping the fire, and the last people from Grenfell Tower that he was able to give assistance to were Isaac's family. He said, "I had never met them previously, but after this I have become family. When they reached the bottom of the tower, I took the little boy [Lukas] and looked after him the whole time near Latimer Road station while they went back to try to find Isaac. ...

"The reason I came to the building was to try to help my friend. I was talking to him [Hashim] until 2:47 a.m. That was the last time I spoke to him. He said, 'My little girl. She's on fire' and then the phone line went dead.

“The last ones [I met] from the tower were Isaac’s family. They came up [to me] and they had breathing problems and they were in shock. They came out of the doors where there is a small alley road, and I said to Isaac’s dad, ‘Give me the little boy.’ His dad said, ‘I lost my other boy. I’m looking for Isaac. I’m looking for my older son.’ I didn’t know Isaac, I didn’t know anyone.”

Regasa asked Isaac’s father to give him his mobile phone number in case they became separated again. He continued, “So they gave me the boy, and the dad and mum ran back to the building. They couldn’t find him, and they came on this side of the building [Silchester Road] and they couldn’t find him.

“The dad then came back to me and said give me my son and he [the boy] said, ‘No, daddy. I don’t want to come to you.’ I said ‘Go, go’. He said ‘no’ as he thought his dad was going to take him back to the building. So I said, ‘Do your own thing and I will keep the little boy.’

“There is a pub just across the road off Latimer Road station, and they opened the door for us about 2:30 in the morning and they gave us free water. That is what we needed at the time because my water was finished already. The fire brigade, they don’t have enough water. They haven’t even got enough oxygen for the people...and then everything goes wrong.”

Regasa said that after Isaac’s parents collected Lukas from him, “I went back then and I saw them dragging out the bodies from the staircase and you can’t see the other side and I just gave up. I knew my friend didn’t make it.

“The firefighters were crying when they came out of the building. They needed water and they didn’t have water. ... They said they had never seen this kind of thing before. They were just crying like little kids. They were exhausted and they did a brilliant job, but it was too much for them. It was over their limits.”



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