
WITNESS STATEMENT OF EMEBET KEFYAWLEW

I, Emebet Kefyalew, wife of Fikeru Shiferaw, of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, will say as follows:

1. I am the wife of one of the victims of the November 2021 tragedy, Fikeru Shiferaw (“**Fikeru**”). The matters set out in this statement are within my knowledge unless otherwise stated. My statement should be read together with the statement from my brother in law, Andargachew Shiferaw, which my legal representatives at Duncan Lewis solicitors have shown to me in draft form on 11 October 2024. I am a designated full participant to the Cranston Inquiry.
2. I make this statement in order to provide relevant information to the ongoing Cranston Inquiry, examining the events of, leading up to and following 24 November 2021, based on my knowledge and understanding of the circumstances leading up to and during the events under scrutiny. I acknowledge that the information that I received from my husband during his journey may not always have been complete and/or accurate. The shock that we experienced as a family when we found out about Fikeru’s death was overwhelming. The days following the 23 November 2021, when I could not get in contact with my husband and when I found out that he was a victim of this incident, were extremely painful and it is very hard for me to remember all of the details from that time. I also would like to say that I believe that the passage of time has really impacted my memory. It has been almost three years since Fikeru left Ethiopia and passed away, and my memory of this time is not as clear as it was. I no longer have my phone from that time either, which would have had messages from Fikeru on it that I am sure would have helped me to remember.
3. This statement was prepared with the assistance of my legal representatives at Duncan Lewis solicitors. I completed this statement in English. I previously prepared a statement with my legal representative for the purposes of requesting an Inquiry into the incident of 23/24 November 2021. This statement can be read alongside my previous statement, dated 2 February 2022 (INQ000068).

Background

4. I am an Ethiopian national born on Personal Data
5. I live with my two children Name PD and Name (born PD with my great uncle in his home in Addis Ababa.

6. Fikeru was 43 years old when he left Addis Ababa to travel to Italy. His birthday was on [PD] This has been incorrectly recorded on his passport and death certificate as [PD]
[PD]
7. Fikeru and I were living together in our own rented home in Addis, with our two children [Name] and [Name] before he left. [Name] was born around a month before Fikeru left Addis Ababa and flew to Italy.
8. Fikeru was a very tall, slim man, around 1.86 m height. He did not have any physical or mental health conditions. He was very strong. He had three unique features that I can remember: he had a grey hair above his right eye, a tattoo of a cross on his arm, and a scar on his chest, which he had since childhood.
9. I met Fikeru in Addis Ababa in 2012. We met through a mutual friend. We became best friends very quickly. We later fell in love and decided to be in a relationship. We got married in Addis Ababa on 10 November 2015.
10. We moved into a one-bedroom apartment in Bole in Addis Ababa together. I was working as a legal advisor at the time, and Fikeru was working in sales. He was often working multiple jobs at a time. Up until he left Addis Abba in November 2021, he was working in marketing for a water company, in which he was a shareholder, and helping in his father's shop, which sold shoe-making supplies.
11. After [Name] was born, we moved to a bigger home. We were very happy during those years before the government changed in 2018 and before the war started in Tigray in November 2020. [Name] was attending a private international school in Addis Ababa. Both Fikeru and I were working and doing well in our jobs. We had a very comfortable life, without any financial issues or any other serious worries. Fikeru's businesses were doing so well that he was able to support not only our little family, but also the other family members such as his parents. Fikeru spent most of his time at home with [Name] and me when he was not at work. We were very happy just spending time together as a family and planning our futures in Addis Ababa.
12. I would like to clarify a mistake from my previous statement. We were not struggling financially as a family before Fikeru left. Fikeru was hiding and spending days away because he was afraid but he continued to earn money for the family. I think what I meant to say in the previous statement was that after Fikeru passed away we no longer had any income and this is when we started to face financial difficulties.

Life in Ethiopia

13. **Sensitive & Irrelevant**
- Sensitive & Irrelevant** War then broke out in Tigray starting in November 2020. Things were very tense all over Ethiopia. **Sensitive & Irrelevant**
- Sensitive & Irrelevant**
14. **Sensitive & Irrelevant**
- Sensitive & Irrelevant** This party had been in power for about 30 years. This meant that almost anyone in business or who travelled around the country would have had Tigrinya friends or contacts, because it was very normal to do business in Tigray before the war, just like other parts of Ethiopia. **Sensitive & Irrelevant**
- Sensitive & Irrelevant**
15. Neither Fikeru nor I were involved in politics or held very strong political opinions. I was working for the civil service up until my pregnancy in 2021. I never had any problems with the government, and I was not directly targeted at any point. I was a legal advisor in the social affairs and labour ministry, helping with employment contracts.
16. I know that Fikeru was very afraid for over a year or so before he left Ethiopia because he felt that he was being targeted. I am not sure exactly why Fikeru was being watched and threatened. **Sensitive & Irrelevant**
- Sensitive & Irrelevant**
- Sensitive & Irrelevant** However, Fikeru never confirmed this to me. He never told me why he thought this was happening. I believe that it was because Fikeru was doing well in his business and he had contacts all over the country, including in Tigray, which might have brought attention to him.
17. During 2020 and 2021, our home was searched at least twice by men. **Sensitive & Irrelevant**
- Sensitive & Irrelevant**
- Sensitive & Irrelevant** I think it is possible that they just gave this as an excuse for why they were raiding the house, as this had become a normal thing

during the war. As far as I know, Fikeru never worked for the TPLF and had no political connections with Tigray.

Sensitive & Irrelevant

Sensitive & Irrelevant

18. As far as I remember, the first search took place before I was pregnant with our second child, so it must have been in late 2020.

Sensitive & Irrelevant

Sensitive & Irrelevant

Fikeru was gone for a few days and when he came back, it was obvious that he had been badly beaten up. He had bruises on his face and around his left eye. Fikeru seemed very afraid, but he did not tell me any details about where he had been taken, how he was treated, or what they wanted from him, so I cannot say why this was happening.

19. Fikeru started staying away from the house for a few days at a time without telling me where he went or why he was staying elsewhere. I said in my previous statement that Fikeru was being '*constantly arrested*.' I would like to clarify that as far as I recall now, there was only one arrest and otherwise, when he spent nights away from home, I would worry that he had been arrested again but I was not sure. I could tell that he was going through a very difficult time, but he did not explain what was happening, I believe in order to protect me. I was pregnant from the beginning of 2021 and I was struggling with bad pregnancy symptoms. I think this is one of the main reasons that Fikeru was not sharing his fears with me during that year. He did not want to put too much stress on me because of my condition.

20. Much of what I know about Fikeru's fears at that time I just picked up by observing him. He was not himself – he was not sleeping well, he seemed distracted, and he was not prioritising his work.

21. On the second occasion that our house was searched, which I think happened some time in 2021, **S&I** were much more violent. They did not take Fikeru away but they did push him around and went through all of our things. I was heavily pregnant at this time, and I am sure that the **S&I** could see this. However, this did not stop the **S&I** from pushing me as well.

22. It is very hard to remember this period in detail, but I think we were searched multiple times; these are just two occasions that I still have in my mind.

23. I did not speak to my friends, family or Fikeru's family about what Fikeru was going through or about how it was affecting my family. It was a very dangerous time for many people in Ethiopia, and I did not want to worry anyone.

24. In October 2021, around the time of [Name] birth, Fikeru told me that he was very afraid and that he felt he had to leave Ethiopia or his life would be at risk. He was having many private calls around this time, and I could tell that he was seriously afraid that he was in danger. He would never have made this decision if there was not something very serious happening.
25. Fikeru did not speak to me about the details but he made it clear that he had to leave the country and that he had to do so as quickly as possible. He left about a month later and he did not tell me specifically where he was going, he just said that he was going to look for somewhere safe. He promised that if things did not get better in Ethiopia, that he would arrange for me and the children to join him. I think he was trying to protect all of us by keeping it all to himself as much as possible.
26. Our home was searched again even after Fikeru had left Ethiopia but the men just came and left. I have not had any more encounters like this since Fikeru passed away and we moved home. I do recall feeling very anxious after Fikeru had left to Italy, and especially when I heard about his death, regarding my safety and my children's safety. I was afraid to leave the house because I was not sure if I was in danger and I no longer had my husband there for protection.

Journey from Ethiopia to France

27. Fikeru travelled to Milan, Italy by plane around 7 November 2021 using his Ethiopian passport. I do not know the details of his trip. I think, as I said in my previous statement, that he made arrangements for a visa with some people in Addis Ababa in November 2021 but I do not know if that was agents or just some friends. I just recall that he said he was trying to get a European visa for the journey.
28. I was in frequent contact with him after he left Ethiopia. We were speaking on the phone and on WhatsApp. I find it very hard to remember the details from this time. I think it is because my memory has been damaged by the grief and suffering that I went through directly after this time, after the incident on 23 November 2021. I would have had more information about exactly what he was doing in France and how he was feeling, but I no longer have this phone.
29. I think Fikeru spent three or four days in Italy and then went to France. He told me that there would be better opportunities there. In France, I think he spent two or three days in Paris. He met another Ethiopian woman on his way to Paris and I think they spoke about travelling together to Calais. Fikeru travelled by train to Calais. When Fikeru first arrived in Calais, I did not think that the reason he had gone to this location was because he was

hoping to cross to the UK. I had not heard of this place in France before and I thought that it was just somewhere that Fikeru had found where he might be able to settle.

30. I no longer recall Fikeru speaking to me about spending any time in the 'jungle' in Calais but my previous statement, which I prepared with my legal representatives, does state that he spent a few nights in the jungle. I do recall that Fikeru met a Catholic priest who was part of an organisation helping people in Calais, who gave him a room to stay in.
31. The priest was a kind man who helped us to gather information about what happened to Fikeru following the incident. I no longer have any contact details for this man and I do not remember his name or address. I just remember that he was very caring during the time that I first found out about Fikeru's death. He even offered to go and identify Fikeru's body himself. He played a major role in helping us get Fikeru's body back to Addis Ababa, along with an organisation in France called Utopia 56.

Northern France

32. As far as I know, Fikeru only tried once to cross the Channel by boat. I spoke to Fikeru on the phone the day before he left France. He was in the priest's house doing his laundry and making food. He seemed like he was in a good mood and sounded positive. Fikeru explained to me that he had decided to try to cross the Channel, but I did not have any specific information about his plans. He told me that he was just looking for somewhere to settle down and that he thought it would be safer and easier in the UK. I just listened to him and accepted it, because he knew a lot more than me about his situation.
33. I spoke to him again on the phone in the afternoon on 23 November 2021. I cannot recall the exact time. We had video call so that our daughter [Name] could see him because she was missing him a lot. She was very upset that he had left. On this call, I could tell that he was not doing so well. He was in the park and it was very cold. He was wearing a big winter jacket and a hat. He was trying to make [Name] laugh by showing her the pigeons that were surrounding him in the park. He told me then that he was waiting for an Ethiopian man who had said he could organise his travel to the UK. He told me that he would tell me later if he was certain that he was going to do the crossing. This was the last time I spoke to him directly on the phone. This is all the information that I have about how Fikeru made his arrangements for the crossing.
34. I asked him to call me back once he had made contact with this man. I missed a call from him that night and then received a voice note at 9.12pm GMT (12.12 am Ethiopian time) saying:

"We have already boarded the boat. We are on the way. I will turn off my phone now. Goodnight, I will call you tomorrow morning."

35. I replied at 9.28pm *"Okay may god be with you"* and he replied one-minute later *"Ok thanks"*. I did not speak to Fikeru again after we exchanged these messages. I exhibited these messages to my previous statement, which I understand has already been provided to the Inquiry. I do not know what happened during the crossing or anything about the shipwreck itself.
36. I only realised after the incident, when I looked at the news reports, that I really had not understood what sort of journey he was planning to make when we spoke on the phone on 23 November 2021. I understood that he was making an arrangement with some kind of smuggler. My main fear at the time was that he was going to get into some kind of trouble for arriving in the UK without the correct documents. He told me that he was going to seek asylum as soon as he arrived and that he would explain everything to the police about his situation. I did not know that he was going to get on a small rubber boat and risk his life in this way. When I saw the boats on the news, I was completely shocked. I had imagined a bigger, more stable boat. It was so hard for me to understand his decision when I saw photos of these boats. He was a reasonable man, with a family that he loved and cared for. I do not know what drove him make this dangerous decision.
37. I do not really understand why Fikeru decided to leave France. I know that he left Ethiopia because he was in danger. He needed to find somewhere safe. From the brief conversations that we had once he was in France, I think he believed that life would be better in the UK. He told me that it would be possible for our family to be reunited there. Fikeru spoke very good English and he believed that he could set up a life with security in the UK.
38. Fikeru was responsible for many people in Ethiopia. He was responsible for me, [Name] and [Name]. He was responsible for his younger brother Yonas who [S&I] Fikeru was paying for his medical appointments and medication. He was responsible for his father's medical needs and was supporting his parents by paying the rent on their home. I am sure that all of this pressure and responsibility would have been weighing on his mind when he was in France. Knowing Fikeru, his mind would have been racing and he would have wanted to take action. He was not the kind of person to sit and wait for a miracle to happen. It is heart breaking to think that this is what led him to take such a dangerous journey, but I believe that this must be what was driving him.

Aftermath of the 23/24 November 2021

39. I had not had any contact with Fikeru since our WhatsApp messages on the 23 November 2021. I had no information about what had happened to him for almost two weeks. I did not know where he was and I had no news of him. Waiting in the face of the unknown was traumatic. I was not sleeping or eating. I could not look after my children properly. I

felt numb. I was not checking the news because I was just waiting for his call. I did not think that he might have been in an accident. I was more worried that maybe he had been arrested and that he was detained somewhere without his phone.

40. Fikeru's little brother was helping me with the children and the housework during this time because I could not cope with my emotions. My daughter was missing her father so much she just wanted to be around her uncle as much as possible.
41. On Sunday 5 December 2021, I found out that Fikeru had drowned in the Channel. At around 4am GMT, some of my family members, including Andargachew, Fikeru's uncles, and my cousins, came to my home to tell me the news. It is traditional in Ethiopia to inform people about the loss of a loved one very early in the morning, so I knew something was wrong as soon as they arrived.
42. They told me that Fikeru had been in an accident in the Channel several days ago and that he had died but they did not have very much information beyond this. Andargachew and Fikeru's uncle had been told this by a friend of Fikeru, called **Name** who had known about Fikeru's plans to cross the Channel on 23 November 2021. I remember I was sitting on the sofa in our living room, with my daughter asleep next to me, when they told me that Fikeru had died.
43. After they told me the news, I think I lost consciousness or maybe the grief has made me forget exactly what happened. I only remember that several hours later, I was sitting at Fikeru's parents house and I was being told by some of the family members in the room that I needed to breast feed my son, **Name**
44. In the evening on 5 December 2021, when I started to feel slightly stronger, I asked Andargachew if he had brought my phone. I started to search online for any information about the incident and what had happened to Fikeru. I found an article about the shipwreck and found the French police number, which it said to call if you were missing a loved one. We had some difficulties communicating because I do not speak French. I was told to contact someone on Whatsapp who would speak to the families of the victims. I spoke to another woman and asked her if she was certain that the passengers had died on the boat and asked how many bodies had been recovered. She said they had recovered more than 20 bodies and that there were survivors. I already knew this from the news on the internet. She asked me to describe specific features that might help to identify Fikeru. I gave them his name, date of birth and a physical description.
45. I then spoke to someone else at the Red Cross and remembered to mention more specific details about Fikeru like his wedding ring, that he had a small tattoo of a cross on his hand, and he had one eye a bit smaller than the other. I also sent some pictures of Fikeru to the

Red Cross to help them identify him. I never heard back from anyone about whether they had identified Fikeru's body from descriptions. We only got confirmation when Fikeru's sister flew from Canada to France to identify the body around 20 days later.

46. After we heard about the incident of 23/24 November 2021, I stayed with Fikeru's parents until his body was returned to Ethiopia and we were able to have a burial at the end of December 2021. We did not struggle financially straight away, because our neighbours were looking after us and bringing us food as is the custom in our culture. We had two mourning periods. The first was when we found out he had died, and then another after his body was returned. Fikeru was buried in Addis Ababa in the Holy Saviour Church. I cannot remember exactly when, but I think it was around 24/25 December 2021. This was important for all of us, particularly Fikeru's mother. I do not think she would have been able to handle his death at all if his body had stayed in France.
47. A French NGO called Utopia 56 helped us to bring Fikeru's body back to Addis Ababa. I was suffering so much during this time that I could not really concentrate on the details and now I cannot remember. Fikeru's family did not pay any money for the return of his body, so I believe that Utopia 56 must have paid for it. It was amazing how much they helped us. But it tortured me to have to speak about Fikeru just as "a body" during that time rather than as a person. I had to deal with so many administrative difficulties. I had to prove that I was his wife but I was told that my marriage certificate was not enough. I had just lost my husband, I was breastfeeding my two-month-old son, and going around government buildings to try to get the right documents together. I still have nightmares about this time.

Impact on our family

48. [Name] and Fikeru were best friends. She was a real "daddy's girl". They would go everywhere together. She still remembers so much about him and is always telling stories about the things that they used to do together. I found this very hard at first because I was missing him so much and I was coping with his loss very differently. But as time moves on, I try my best to talk about him with her and keep the memory of him alive. She does not know how her father died but she understands that he is no longer with us and that he is with God and at peace. [Name] was only a month old when Fikeru left and he is still too young to really understand that he does not have a father anymore.
49. When I went home with my children after the funeral, I realised we were facing serious financial problems without Fikeru to support us. We had to leave our home because it was too expensive and I had to take [Name] out of her school. We now live with my great-uncle and he supports us. We are making things work but it has been difficult for all of us since Fikeru passed away because he was the one who was supporting all of us and looking

after us. I am struggling to go back to work after what happened. I do not feel strong enough. I try to work part-time but this is not enough. I am also trying to complete my master's degree, which I had to stop for a while after Fikeru's death. I am currently completely dependent on my great-uncle and other family members.

50. Fikeru's older brother, Andargachew, comes to visit my children every Sunday and the whole family come together to visit Fikeru's parents as much as possible. Fikeru's father became very ill after Fikeru died and he is not able to move around easily. Fikeru's mother has had to stop working so that she can be his full-time carer. Following Fikeru's death they could not afford to stay in their home anymore, because Fikeru financially supported them, and so they now live much further away on the outskirts of Addis Ababa.
51. Fikeru's death changed all of our lives forever. We have all had to adapt to living life without him and finding ways to support ourselves given that so many of us in the family were dependent on him.

Conclusion

52. I am not sure when or who told me, but a while after the incident I heard that the boat had probably been in British waters and that the British coastguard did not save them. It makes me so angry to think about this and how badly human beings are treated, how policies play a role in people's fate. It is so hard to accept that this is how Fikeru lost his life. He was a man that was loved by all and he was a lifesaver for all, he would do everything he could to make life easier for other people.
53. Fikeru was such a humble and kind person. He was a people pleaser and he had a kind heart. He loved his family so much, and he would never have left us if he had not felt threatened in Ethiopia. Fikeru was a committed family man who felt very strongly about his country. He always tried to help others, especially those who were struggling and who had less. He always told me to help others and he never failed to do that himself. Seeing others smile warmed his soul and heart. His beliefs were based on God's word and sharing. He was a family man and he spent his time on work, doing charity works and with his family. His daughter was his favourite companion. He enjoyed taking care of her and playing with her. They always went to church together on Sundays. She has been asking for her dad and her best friend every day since he left home, and she still does not understand why her dad is not here and why he is not playing with her, even if just through a phone call.
54. His hobbies were cooking and reading books. He was the best cook I know. He was loved by his families, friends and colleagues. His mother was his best friend and advisor. His voice always changed when he called her name and talked about her. He adored her so

much and she has been broken after losing her beloved son and friend. He was such a great husband and friend too. He never failed to love and care for me until death stopped him. We had such a beautiful bond, and totally loved each other. He knew how to take care of me and be my best friend, husband, and life partner. He deserves every admiration in the world since he was the perfect man and partner and I thank him for that - for the love and respect he gave me until death took him away from me and our beautiful kids.

55. I know that nothing can bring him back and nothing can take away my pain or save me from my sleepless nights. Nothing can bring back the loving father and son. No one will bring my best friend back. But I do hope that this does not happen to anyone else because no one deserves to endure this pain. No daughter, no son, no mother, no father, no wife, no sibling.

56. I hope that people will get more protection in the future. I hope those who are responsible will understand how serious this is and understand that the people on that boat were humans as much as anyone else.

Statement of Truth

I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings for contempt of court may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to made, false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief in its truth.

Signed: **Personal Data**

Date: **07/11/24**

Name: **Emebet Kefyalew**