
WITNESS STATEMENT OF ANNA RICHEL

I, Anna Richel, of Personal Data previously a coordinator for Utopia 56, will say as follows:

1. I was one of two coordinators in Dunkirk employed by the French organisation Utopia 56 from June 2021 to October 2022. Utopia 56 is a citizen mobilisation association which works to improve the reception and living conditions of migrants in France, and to defend their rights.
2. I make this statement in order to provide relevant information to the ongoing Cranston Inquiry regarding my encounter on 16 November 2021 with Kazhal Ahmed Khidir Al-Jammour and her children Hadiya Rizgar Hussein, Mubin Rizgar Hussein, Hasti Rizgar Hussein, who were all victims of the Shipwreck on 23/24 November 2021. I will refer to them by the first names throughout this statement.
3. The facts and matters set out in this statement are within my own personal knowledge unless otherwise stated. Where they are not, I identify the source of my understanding or belief.
4. This statement was prepared with the assistance of Duncan Lewis solicitors who I understand represent a survivor and the families of several of the victims of the incident in November 2021, including Rizghar Hussein, the husband and father of the family I met.

Background

5. I started working as a coordinator at Utopia 56 in June 2021. I lived in Dunkirk and managed a team of approximately 15 volunteers in the field. I was working at Utopia 56 at the time of the Shipwreck on 23/24 November 2021, which the Cranston Inquiry is investigating.

6. In and around November 2021 the Utopia 56 team in Dunkirk were under a lot of pressure because of the high numbers of displaced people in Dunkirk. The number of attempted Channel crossings each day and night had been rising and, at that point, was very high. My colleagues who had been working in Dunkirk since November 2020 observed that there were far more people in camps trying to cross the Channel in November 2021 than at this time the previous year. We had previously observed that it was usual for people to leave Dunkirk around November, because the weather conditions were too bad to cross the Channel at that time of year. I cannot explain why this did not happen in November 2021. I just recall that there were still a significant number of people in the camps at this time, and I, along with my colleagues, was very concerned about the number of crossings happening in winter conditions.

Meeting Kazhal and her children

7. Early in the morning of 16 November 2021, the French police cleared the major camp in Grand-Synthe, near the port of Dunkirk. This camp had around 1000 people staying there who were all evicted. I understand that Nikolai Posner, who is currently working with Utopia 56, has provided a statement on behalf of the organisation for this Inquiry, which goes into more detail about this eviction.

8. There were many evictions during this time. I cannot recall exactly how we found out about this one because we were often getting up early in the mornings to drive to the camps to see if there had been an eviction overnight. During this particular eviction, many people staying in the camp started calling Utopia 56's emergency number. Some told us they were being forced onto buses and they did not know where they were

being taken. Everyone in the camp lost their shelter and most of their belongings. They were taken elsewhere in France via bus or just left to sleep on the streets.

9. The morning of the eviction, Utopia 56 went to the camp to see if we could assist people who were still there and to document the effect of the eviction. I was there with my co-coordinator Marie from very early on in the morning. We saw the police carrying out the eviction and the cleaning trucks coming in. We were not allowed to enter the camp while this was happening so we were waiting on the edge for people who needed assistance. We were there to explain to people who were coming back to the camp what had happened and to signpost people to other organisations who could provide food, clothing and shelter.
10. I met Kazhal, Hasti, Mubin and Hadiya at around 1pm just outside the camp. The buses taking people to other parts of France had already left at this point and I think there were only a few police officers still at the site. The cleaning team were still on site, removing all tents and belongings. The family told us that they had come back from an attempted boat crossing that morning. We saw them walking towards us near the camp, which had been destroyed in the early hours of the morning while they had been gone. They all looked exhausted. Their clothes were completely soaked through. They arrived at the camp to find that everything had been destroyed and there was no shelter anymore. They no longer had anywhere to rest.
11. They asked us for help to find shelter for the night. I suggested they sit inside our car, so that they could get warm and rest, while Marie and I were trying to arrange shelter for them. Kazhal and her youngest child, Hasti, were barely speaking. They just sat in the Utopia car for around four hours looking tired and weak. The two older children sat with me for a while outside the car. We talked at length because they spoke very good English.
12. Mubin told me he was very hopeful that they would make it to the UK, and that they would have a better life there. Hadiya was thanking us for helping them. She kept pleading with me to eat something with them and trying to make sure that I was ok.

They were both very open with me and kind. They wanted to help all the people around us, who did not know what to do because the camp they had been living in had been destroyed.

13. This family made a strong impression on me because they were so united. It was emotionally intense to see them altogether because they seemed so close and open-hearted even though they were going through a desperate time. Mubin and Hadiya were offering their help to me, and other people around us, and smiling. I still remember how they were making people who had been evicted from the camp feel at ease. I have tried to remember every detail about our interaction because meeting this family had such a powerful impact on me. However, a few years have passed now so I cannot remember everything we said to each other. I am mostly left with the lasting impression of how kind and loving they were.
14. Three other families were in the same situation as Kazhal and her children, and needed help finding somewhere safe to rest.
15. I called the office for the Mayor of Grand-Synthe, Martial Beyaert, to explain the situation and request emergency accommodation for the four families. It took many hours to persuade the Mayor's office to assist us. However, by the early evening, they offered to provide the families with one hotel room each for two nights. This was very unusual. At that point, I had been working in Dunkirk for 10 months and I had never experienced the Mayor's office actually agreeing to do something like this. I believe it is likely they were concerned about the potential negative publicity if they left four families with nowhere to go, because the eviction was receiving a lot of media attention.
16. My colleague drove Kazhal and Hasti in the Utopia 56 car to the hotel where they were told they could stay for the next two days. I went on the bus with Mubin and Hadiya and dropped them at the hotel. I think they were accommodated in the Ibis Budget hotel in Grand-Synthe, but I do not have a clear recollection of which hotel it was.

17. I did not see them again after this but other volunteers at Utopia 56 mentioned that they saw them around the encampments in Dunkirk. I cannot recall if anyone else spoke with them.

18. I first heard about the Shipwreck of 23/24 November 2021 on 24 November 2021. The organisations in Calais and Dunkirk were all communicating over group chats as information was coming in and I was already being contacted by journalists to comment on the situation whilst the rescue operation was underway. This period straight after the shipwreck was difficult. It was probably the most difficult period of work in my life. I was coordinating the project on my own because my colleague was away at the time. I had to do many interviews with journalists at this time who were all over Dunkirk. I was trying very hard to keep focussed and so I was trying to avoid seeing any photos of the victims. I was afraid of how I would react if I realised that I had known some of the victims.

19. It was about a week after the 23/24 November that I realised that Kazhal and her children had all died in the Shipwreck. I found out because I saw their photos in some media coverage about the incident. After I found out that Kazhal and her children were in the shipwreck, I felt very weak. I was devastated by the news and I kept thinking about how awful it must be for Kazhal's husband having lost his whole family. I kept imagining them in such a desperate situation, calling for help and trying to survive in the freezing water. I was so angry that the British and the French had left this mother and her children, with so much hope for their future, to die at sea.

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: Anna Richel

Date: 25 October 2024

Name: **Personal Data**