

# Jeremy Corbyn speech at Labour's Make Homes Safe Launch

\*\*\*CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY\*\*\*

**Jeremy Corbyn MP, Leader of the Labour Party**, speaking at Labour's Make Homes Safe launch today, said:

We are here today less than 150 days after the country woke up to the devastating news of the fire at Grenfell Tower.

It was a fire that shocked the whole country.

A 24 storey tower block subsumed in flames. Whole families, adults and young children alike, trapped inside the tower with no chance of escape.

The scenes inside that tower would have been unimaginable hell.

Firefighters entered the burning building nonetheless at huge risk to themselves, saving many lives. But far too many, at least 80 people, were beyond rescue.

On the morning after the Grenfell Fire I visited the scene and I talked to those who lived in the tower and the surrounding area.

They were in shock and they were grieving. People simply did not believe that such a horrifying event could take place in 2017, in the UK's richest borough, in the 5<sup>th</sup> richest nation on earth.

But tragically it didn't happen by chance but because of shockingly avoidable political decisions, driven by a cruel and failed economic ideology.

The country was shocked and the local community was hurting but it was this shock and pain that prompted such an inspirational response from the local community in this part of West London.

It was a response  
stirred by the shared grief of innocent adults and children having their  
lives  
taken from them in the fire.

Stirred by the pain of  
seeing that burning building, knowing there were people trapped inside and  
stirred by the anger of knowing that working class voices had been ignored  
once  
again; and that a tragedy of this shocking scale had been allowed to happen.

Although the local  
council of Kensington and Chelsea has faced criticisms for its response to  
the  
fire, other local authorities, such as here in Hammersmith and Fulham,  
deserve  
to be acknowledged for their efforts to help those affected by the fire.

Whether it was running  
fundraising events or directly offering the use of their own council services  
and council officers free of charge, it was this council, along with others  
including my own, that did what it could to help those in need.

Local organisations  
and community groups have also played a huge part in the response. Queen's  
Park  
Rangers Football Club for instance managed to raise almost one million pounds  
for legacy projects that will leave a lasting impact in the area around  
Grenfell.

Combined with the  
efforts of individuals, charities and local small businesses, this response  
was  
a heartening example of the unbreakable strength of communities and sense of  
solidarity in this hugely diverse and multi-faith area of London.

On the morning that I  
visited Grenfell I also had the chance to talk to some of the firefighters  
who  
battled that deadly inferno for hours.

Utterly exhausted,  
these were the women and men who saved large numbers of people – adults  
and children.

I asked them why they  
did it? Why did they put themselves in such danger, saving the lives of  
people  
who they've never even met.

They answered without  
any hesitation: "We do it because it's our job".

Because on that night,  
firefighters of the London Fire Brigade did do their job.

Firefighters across  
the country have faced the harsh reality of politically driven austerity.

Along with the other  
emergency services across the UK they have been forced to deal with repeated  
budget cuts since 2010.

In the last seven  
years 10,000 frontline firefighter jobs have gone; equivalent to one in six  
positions.

This is a staggering  
figure and is compounded by the loss of fire stations, equipment and the loss  
of almost a third of fire safety inspectors in the same period, with some  
areas  
such as West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue, which covers the city of Leeds,  
having  
lost as many as 70 per cent of its inspectors.

Indeed, because of the  
continual loss of firefighters' jobs, if the fire at Grenfell had occurred  
outside of London there would not have been enough firefighters in the  
vicinity  
to tackle a blaze of that size.

That is why Labour is  
committed to recruiting 3,000 new firefighter jobs with a full review of  
staffing levels.

This is essential if  
we are to improve response times and ensure the fire and rescue service has  
the  
resources it needs to do the job – which they do with such professionalism  
– of keeping us safe.

As firefighters  
themselves say: if we are serious about reducing deaths and injuries from  
fire,  
we need a co-ordinated approach across government. We need a well-funded  
fully  
staffed fire and rescue service but what is also needed is a strong focus on  
fire  
prevention.

We must make sure that  
nothing like the fire at Grenfell Tower can ever happen again.

But to make sure it  
doesn't we need action and we need action now.

Of course we are all waiting for the result of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry but there is some action that we believe the government could, and should take immediately.

The retrofitting of sprinklers in all high rise social housing is something that could make a vital difference to people's safety.

The evidence is clear: where sprinkler systems have already been fitted, injuries sustained from fires have been cut by approximately 80 per cent and deaths from fires have almost been eliminated entirely.

But don't just take my word for it.

Take the word of the Chief Fire Officers Association. They support retrofitting because they recognise that sprinklers are both the most effective and the most efficient method to quell fires which occur in high rise buildings.

Take the word of the London Fire Brigade; the very people who risked their lives at Grenfell Tower and risk their lives every single day to put out other fires across this city, who have repeatedly called for retrofitting of sprinklers.

And take the word of the Coroner in its 2013 report after the fire at Lakanal House who recommended the retrofitting of sprinklers in all high rise residential buildings.

Two Conservative governments in succession have failed to act on that Coroner's report.

We said after that dreadful fire at Lakanal House in 2009 we would never allow anything similar to happen again, and yet here we are, eight years later, after an even worse avoidable fire.

The evidence is overwhelming. When almost every authoritative source on the matter is saying the same thing: that retrofitting of sprinklers is necessary in high rise housing.

This measure is just common sense and will protect thousands of lives.

It is our duty to listen to this clear and unambiguous advice.

Retrofitting of sprinklers is something that many Local Authorities know is necessary to ensure the safety of residents in high rise social housing. But with their budgets slashed by an average of 40 per cent since 2010 it is something that very few of them can afford.

A small number of Local Authorities such as the London Borough of Croydon have managed to find the funds to retrofit sprinklers. But of course on councils' shoe string budgets, doing this can mean cuts to other vital services.

That is why people across the country are now looking at central government to act.

The government tells us time and time again that there are difficult choices to be made. "We are all in this together" they used to say.

And yet while people are living in potential death-trap homes without essential safety protections such as sprinklers, it is an obscenity that we have super rich elites and major corporations who are allowed to avoid paying their taxes. There can be little disagreement. The government must get its act together, take on the tax avoiders and put the billions of pounds that is being taken from the pockets of the British people back into the public services and safe homes we all so desperately need.

Social housing in this country has been badly and dangerously neglected for far too long.

Deregulation imposed by successive governments has caused a shocking collapse in standards.

While luxury accommodation proliferates across our big cities far out of reach of the vast majority of the population, the poorest in our country are forced to live not just in dilapidated run-down housing, but also in dangerous housing.

Time and time again this government has shown itself to be callous and indifferent to working class concerns.

But now we are asking this government to do something positive for those who live in social housing.

With the budget approaching imminently the government has a genuine opportunity to make a

real

difference to people's lives by making available the government funds that local councils are crying out for to improve the safety of high rise residents.

It is the primary

responsibility of any government to ensure the safety of its citizens and we believe it is therefore the responsibility of the Prime Minister and the Chancellor to make this money available to local authorities and devolved administrations across the whole of the UK.

We must be serious

about people's safety and governments cannot protect people on the cheap.

We see ourselves as a

civilised society. We know that as a nation we should provide universal healthcare for the sick, decent pensions for the elderly, good quality education for every child to get on in life, but we also need to ensure that everybody has a home that is not just secure but also safe.

Funding retrofitting

of sprinklers is an immediate step that Theresa May can take in the Autumn Budget.

It will ensure that

high rise residents can sleep more safely in their beds.

That is why today,

Labour is launching our campaign to Make Homes Safe.

The campaign's aim is

for sprinklers to be fitted in all social housing throughout the country which

is 30 metres or above – around ten or more storeys.

We are asking for the

public's support to make sure the government listens to the concerns that we share with tower block residents, the Fire and Rescue Service and other professionals.

Retrofitting of

sprinkler systems is a basic demand but it is one that will save lives if the government decides to make it happen.

Grenfell was an

avoidable tragedy. It did not have to happen and it would not have happened if

adequate precautions, including sprinklers, were in place.

So please, sign our

letter and help us make sure that residents of high rise social housing can sleep safely in their beds, safe in the knowledge that they are being listened

to.

Thank you

ENDS