PRESS STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FIRE SAFETY ISSUES IN CONNECTION WITH THE TRAGIC GRENFELL TOWER FIRE IN LONDON

First and foremost, our thoughts and prayers are with the victims and community who suffered as a result of the recent tragic Grenfell Tower fire in North Kensington in London.

As Architects, it is always a special concern to us when lives are lost through building failures like this. We do not need to be reminded of our own Highland Towers or the recent fire incident at Hospital Sultanah Aminah JB.

To allay the fears of Malaysians regarding the safety of our high rise residential buildings, we wish to state the following:

1) Under the Uniform Building By Laws 1984 enacted under the Street Drainage And Building Act 1974, a similar building will not comply with the fire safety requirements and therefore will not be approved for construction in Malaysia post 1984.

2) Passive Fire Safety Provisions under the UBBL 1984

   a) As a minimum requirement, a similar building in Malaysia will be required to have at least two PROTECTED fire escape staircases designed to carry the anticipated occupant load with redundancy in the event one staircase becomes inoperable or compromised.

   b) Every floor will be required to be designed as a compartment (fire resistant) floor with fire barriers to prevent the spread of fire from floor to floor both internally and externally while the escape passages are protected from fires originating from any apartment units.

   c) Any cladding system that contains combustible materials will not be allowed in any building higher than 18m or 5 storeys to prevent flame spread through the external façade.

   d) Each apartment will be designed as a fire compartment designed with fire rated doors to contain the fire and prevent fire spread in the event of a mishap while allowing occupants time to evacuate the building. The fire escape staircases will be required to be protected from fire by means of fire resistant walls and doors.

3) Active Fire Safety Provisions under the UBBL 1984

   a) Residential Buildings of a similar nature in Malaysia shall be provided with a fire detection and alarm system in the common area to provide early warning to the occupants to evacuate the building in the event of a fire. Under the amended UBBL 2012, already adopted in Selangor, each apartment will be equipped with at least a smoke detector.
b) The alarm system in the common area will be required to be linked directly to the local Fire Command Centre via a mandatory Central Monitoring System (CMS) to ensure speedy response by the Fire and Rescue Services.

c) Pressurised wet riser or hydrant and hose reels shall be provided on every floor for fire-fighting purposes. These are backed by water storage tanks and pumps running on independent power supply in the event of an emergency. The UBBL also requires that external hydrants be provided for the building to ensure supplementary water supply to fight fires.

d) The building will be required to have a Firemen’s Lift with intercom services for use by the Fire and Rescue Services Personnel to conduct fire-fighting and search and rescue in the event of a fire outbreak. This will also be run on an independent power supply in the event of an emergency.

e) The staircases and lift lobbies as mentioned earlier are installed with pressurised ducted fans to keep out smoke for evacuation, fire-fighting and rescue in an emergency.

In commercial buildings such as shopping malls, hotels and factories that are defined as high risk “Designated Premises” under the Fire Services Act, in addition to provided passive and active fire safety features, the owners are required to undergo an annual fire audit before they are issued with a Fire Certificate (FC) by Fire and Rescue Department.

In March 2017, the KL Fire and Rescue Department reported in a local daily only 739 “Designated Premises” have been issued with FC while 321 applications were still pending. The Department clarified 18,000 buildings have been identified as potentially requiring the FC.

We have to stress however, building owners are advised to conduct regular inspection and maintenance of the fire safety features to be in good working order including familiarisation exercises for evacuation procedures and escape routes.

Building owners must be wary of unauthorised renovations or alterations carried out in their properties that may obstruct fire escapes or conceal fire alarms and detectors. Older buildings will usually require more attention as fire-fighting equipment becomes dilapidated and inoperable over time.

With the above statement, it is hoped that readers will better understand the fire safety provisions in high rise residential buildings in Malaysia.

Prepared by:
1. Ar Ezumi Harzani Ismail, President, on behalf of Pertubuhan Akitek Malaysia (PAM) www.pam.org.my; and
2. Ar Anthony Lee Tee, on behalf of Architect Centre Sdn Bhd (a subsidiary of PAM that provides Independent Property Inspections & Reports, Advisory, Seminars and Trainings) www.architectcentre.com.my

Contact Person:
Zarina Ibrahim, Executive Secretary, Pertubuhan Akitek Malaysia
Tel: +603-22022866
Email: zarina@pam.org.my