

WITNESS STATEMENT OF KAAAN OFLI

I, Kaan Ofli make this statement, on the basis of my knowledge, save where otherwise states. I say as follows:

- 1 This statement is about the experience I had in Victoria's COVID-19 Hotel Quarantine Program (**Quarantine**). My partner and I entered Quarantine at the Pan Pacific Hotel on 9 April 2020 and exited on 23 April 2020.
- 2 Before travelling back to Melbourne, my partner and I had been living in Phuket, Thailand. The Australian Embassy arranged an evacuation flight from Thailand via Doha, Qatar.
- 3 I arrived into Melbourne on 9 April 2020 and was quarantined on the same day.

Entering Quarantine

- 4 I heard through family and friends, and through various news stories that it would be possible my partner and I would be entering into Quarantine. I was informed formally when the plane arrived in Melbourne and either an Australian Federal Police or Customs Officer told us what was going to happen.
- 5 When I arrived in Melbourne, I was told to stand in the aisle of the plane in close proximity to other passengers for approximately 30-40 minutes, while being told what would happen. When we got off the plane, my partner and I had our temperatures checked and were ushered in small groups to desks where both airport and Department of Health and Human Services (**DHHS**) staff were present. We received our Detention Notices and were asked to sign them without being given time to read them.
- 6 We collected our bags and were directed to the Sky Bus that took us to the hotel, it was quite full, with approximately 40-50 people.
- 7 When I arrived at the Pan Pacific, all the passengers from the bus were in the lobby and the check in process was quite chaotic. I received a series of newsletters and documents that were slipped under our door when we checked into the room. One was titled 'advice for all arrivals' and explained that I was not to leave the room for 14 days and the excessive penalties associated with failing to comply. Others had general information about deliveries and ordering and included the phone number for Government Services. Annexed to this statement are copies of those documents.
- 8 My partner also filled out a form at reception about dietary requirements, as she needed dairy and peanut free options and I required Halal meals. We were taken to our room by a security guard, who was wearing a mask. We carried our own luggage.
- 9 When we got up to the room my partner and I were hungry as it had been a while since we had eaten. We received food on the plane and were offered Tim Tams by DHHS at the airport, it was like a lunchbox snack, but we were really hungry by the time we got to the room.

During Quarantine

Adequacy of food and access to basics

- 10 We experienced issues with the staff from our first day in Quarantine. It began with an ongoing issue with the amount of food we were getting. My partner called reception to tell them we were only getting enough food for one person. They told her to call government services but that if we wanted, we could order off a hotel menu for quarantine guests. We called reception and government services numerous times about the lack of food. My partner found it humiliating to have to call and plead for the basics, it was really disheartening. We started ordering off the hotel menu, even though it was pretty expensive, because we were really hungry.
- 11 It was not until later that we realised we weren't getting enough food because they didn't know I was in the room as well. A nurse from DHHS would call our room every day to ask whether we had any symptoms. On 19 April 2020, the 10th day of our Quarantine, when the nurse called, my partner said, "we were fine" and the nurse asked why she had said "we". She told me the records showed my partner was the only person in the room. My partner told them I was there too and that she had talked to reception numerous times about not having enough food for both of us.
- 12 I then got on the phone and spoke to the nurse to give them all of my details. I was asked about basic contact information as well as whether I had a medical history. I confirmed with the nurses that they didn't have any of those details prior and asked why not. The nurse said she didn't know as she had just started the day before. My partner and I had thought the issue with the food was just a catering issue but realised then that they didn't seem to have records of me at all.
- 13 After they had updated their records to include me, we were told that the hotel could not accommodate our dietary requirements. I had been eating the food we had been given previously, thinking it was Halal, because my partner had told them that I was Halal in the beginning. It was a shock for us when we realised the meat I had been eating was not Halal. At this point we were told, because they couldn't accommodate our requirements, that we could order Uber Eats and would be reimbursed later. They gave us a form to fill in that had information about what we could be reimbursed. Annexed to this statement is a copy of that document.
- 14 It was expensive to order Uber Eats and off the hotel menu, so my partner had to borrow money from her mum to pay for our food in Quarantine. We'd just come back from living in Thailand and were spending the last of our savings. Neither of us had jobs to go to at that stage. We still haven't been reimbursed for our Uber Eats and when my partner tried to follow up, she keeps getting told to speak to different departments.
- 15 We were also made to drink water from the bathroom basin and were not given bottled water. If we wanted bottled water, we had to purchase it and it was also expensive.

- 16 There was no laundry service during our stay. When my partner called to tell them, we had run out of clean clothes, she was given dishwashing liquid and told to wash our clothes in the bathroom sink. Because there was no air circulation, the clothes were not drying properly and were damp, and the room started to smell damp. She tried to dry the clothes with the hair dryer, which didn't work well.
- 17 There was no cleaning service as they did not consider it safe for the hotel cleaners to enter the room. They did say we could use a vacuum that they had, but they told my partner this was shared between the guests and we didn't know if it was being cleaned between uses. It would stay out in the hallway most of the time and whenever we used it we were told just to put it back outside the door. It seemed to us like it was a vacuum for the rooms on our floor. My partner also asked for a disinfectant and was told they did not have any, they provided spray and wipe instead. The vacuum also had a really awful smell when we used it. We had to open the door of our room for ventilation because none of the windows opened.

Access to fresh air breaks

- 18 For the first few days of Quarantine we were not allowed to go outside and that was the policy. Then on 12 April 2020, a DHHS staff member rang and told me that we would get compassionate walks and could book in a 10 to 15 minute walk outside. We went on our first walk on the same day. A security guard came to the door and took us down the lift, he was wearing a mask.
- 19 We had our walks in a courtyard at the front of the hotel. It was a public area, but if members of the public tried to walk through, security ushered them away. We were never in close proximity to the public.
- 20 Other guests were permitted to have their breaks at the same time. There would be up to four to five rooms going on walks at once. We had to wear my mask on the way to the courtyard, but once outside, we were allowed to take it off. My partner and I were always brought downstairs on our own, never with other guests.
- 21 On the walks, many guests didn't wear masks. Guests would congregate, talk to one another and share experiences. It was a way of finding out information about different policies. It was how we heard that other guests had been getting Uber Eats. My partner and I were cautious and tried to maintain our distance during these conversations, but, social distancing was not strictly enforced, and other guests would stand quite close to each other. The guards were not as aware of social distancing as the Authorised Officers but I do not think this was them being non-compliant, they were just being human.

Interactions with security, medical and hotel staff

- 22 My partner asked the security guard who took us on our first walk why we were now allowed to have compassionate walks. He told us it was because another quarantine guest at the Pan Pacific had unfortunately taken their own life. This was really upsetting to hear. When we got back to the room after our walk, I was feeling upset and disturbed, it hit pretty close to home as there have been suicides in my family .

- 23 The same guard told us in the lift that he was overwhelmed as he didn't have experience managing a team and he hadn't been properly trained. I think this guard may have been from Security Corp.
- 24 I also felt that hotel staff, along with security at times, would threaten us with punitive measures. There was one occasion where I was particularly anxious and requested a walk in the evening. I opened the door and was trying to engage with security to get some assistance. Eventually four security guards came to the room to take me downstairs. After this, I was told that if I tried to leave his room again Victoria Police would be called, and I would be issued a \$20,000 fine. This occurred about ten days into our stay. My partner and I, at times, were made to feel like inmates.
- 25 Our interactions with medical staff were mainly over the phone. My partner got daily checks from medical staff to ask if she was experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19. She was never offered a test. She did request a test but was told that we would only be tested if we had symptoms and if we had symptoms, we would be sent to the isolation floor. The isolation floor is where all the guests who had tested positive were recovering.
- 26 After that my partner never asked for medical care, even though I had a tooth ache and she was in severe pain due to endometriosis. We didn't want to be taken to the isolation floor. We thought we would be at greater risk of contracting COVID-19 and we were worried that they would only take one of us and we would be separated. No one said that to us exactly, it was just an impression we got, but we really didn't want to be separated, it would have made the experience so much worse.
- 27 There was also a time when a person came right into our room, I think it was an accident, but it was strange. It was on 18 April 2020, and I was sitting on my laptop facing the door and all of a sudden a woman came into the room, she didn't knock. We made eye contact and she just looked at me like a deer in headlights. When she opened the door and saw us, she turned around straight away and walked down the corridor. My partner called out to her, but she did not turn back. My partner asked a security guard who she was, he said she worked for government services. My partner reported the incident to the government services line. She received a return call from a Team Leader who apologised and confirmed the breach had been noted.

Leaving Quarantine

- 28 I found the arrangements in place to leave quarantine were quite efficient. We were staying in Melbourne and did not have to continue our journey. We were provided a window of time to leave, it was a 12 hour window. They ordered us a taxi and we went straight home. We were not told to wear PPE or offered a COVID test when leaving.
- 29 My overall experience was not very good. We really struggled with the food issues and just felt our concerns about it were dismissed. It was hard to constantly call and try and get access to basic necessities, it was really humiliating.

Signature

KO

Print name

KAAN OFLI

Date

21 August 2020