

Statement of Sir John Saunders, Chairman of the Manchester Arena Inquiry, on the application for Core Participant status by 56 survivors of the Manchester Arena attack

This application has been made by a number of those who survived the Arena attack. The attack has had a terrible and lasting impact on them, as it has for so many others. The injuries, trauma and personal tragedy that the survivors have suffered cannot be overstated and I fully appreciate that this application is borne of the desire of the survivors to ensure that the reasons for the attack are fully understood, the adequacy of the emergency response is examined, and that lessons are learned.

After a great deal of anxious thought, I have decided to refuse this application. That does not mean that the survivors will not have a voice in this Inquiry; they will. The issue for me to decide has been whether in order to have such a voice and effectively participate in this Inquiry, the survivors require Core Participant status. After careful consideration, I have concluded that they will be able to contribute to the Inquiry without Core Participant status and I strongly encourage them to do so.

I intend to call survivors who can give relevant evidence as witnesses during the Inquiry. As they were at the scene, they may have critical evidence to provide. The Inquiry will ensure they are able to provide it. Having suffered such serious injuries, the survivors will want answers as to why the attack happened, whether it could have been prevented, and what lessons can be learned. In announcing the establishment of the Inquiry, the Home Secretary expressed her hope that the bereaved families and the survivors will get the answers they need. That is a hope that I share. To help achieve it, the survivors will be able to raise any concerns with my legal team and identify lines of inquiry that they would wish to have pursued. The Inquiry will ensure that straightforward mechanisms are in place to allow survivors to communicate with my team. The survivors will also be able to engage with and participate in the Inquiry in a number of other ways: they can attend the Inquiry's hearings or view them through the livestream available on the Inquiry's website, and they can access transcripts, evidence and documents on the Inquiry's website.

The terms of reference for the Inquiry are identical to those for the inquests into the deaths of those killed in the attack. Their focus is on ensuring that the Inquiry provides a full, fair and fearless investigation into the terrible events that resulted in the 22 deaths at the Arena. In investigating the attack, I will have not only my own independent legal team but also four legal teams representing the bereaved families who will assist me in my investigation. The combination of my own team, the input of the bereaved families, and the contribution of the survivors, will ensure the thorough and effective inquiry that is needed.

In the event, I am satisfied that the survivors' important contribution to the Inquiry can take place without Core Participant status. Their voice is an important one and it will be heard.

Sir John Saunders
21 April 2020