

UNDER

THE COMMISSIONS OF INQUIRY ACT 1908

IN THE MATTER OF

**ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO
BUILDING FAILURE CAUSED BY CANTERBURY
EARTHQUAKES**

**KOMIHANA A TE KARAUNA HEI TIROTIRO I
NGA WHARE I HORO I NGA RUWHENUA O
WAITAHA**

AND IN THE MATTER OF

THE CTV BUILDING COLLAPSE

**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF NILGUN ELIZABETH KULPE
IN RELATION TO THE CTV BUILDING**

DATE OF HEARING: COMMENCING 25 JUNE 2012

**STATEMENT OF NILGUN ELIZABETH KULPE
IN RELATION TO THE CTV BUILDING**

Personal Background

1. My full name is Nilgun Elizabeth Kulpe. I have lived in New Zealand since 1985. I live on Banks Peninsula.
2. I have worked as a Counsellor at Relationship Services since 2007. My role involves working with individuals, couples and families. I also participate in supervision.
3. Relationship Services occupied the 5th floor (Level 6) of the CTV Building (the building). I was on the 5th floor along the western side of the building when the 22 February earthquake hit.

Before 4 September 2010

4. The building would vibrate whenever they were doing aerobics classes at Les Mills, which was a fitness centre next to the CTV Building. I sat near the external wall on the western side of the building and I could see them from my window. Clients would ask me if it was an earthquake and I would tell them it was just people doing aerobics and to take a look for themselves. The movement did not startle me until after the 4 September earthquake. I guess because I was more sensitive to movement after this.
5. They began demolishing the Les Mills building in 2010 before the 4 September earthquake. My understanding was that they wanted to upgrade the Les Mills building and it had nothing to do with the earthquakes. I did not notice any movement in the building when the demolition was being carried out. It was very noisy, but there was no shaking or vibrations. When the aerobics classes started up again the movement was back. It was like a light vibration and you knew that they were doing their classes.

After 4 September 2010

6. After the September earthquake I was surprised that the building was re-opened on the Tuesday. I thought surely we would be closed for a while. I rang the administration desk at work on Monday and was told that we were open and that we had the green

sticker. I cannot remember who I spoke to. I wondered how fast a building of that size could be assessed and deemed to be ok.

7. A number of areas of damage had appeared on the 5th floor. Attached is a floor plan of the building I have prepared (marked "A"). The positions of the rooms and internal walls have not been drawn to scale and their placement is approximate only. The issues of concern that I refer to in my evidence are marked on this plan.
8. I noticed a small crack in the foyer by the lifts. I have marked this as "1" on the plan. It ran vertically on a slight diagonal. From memory I would say it was approximately 1.5 metres in length. It ran above the window and underneath the window as well.
9. I felt really scared being in the CTV building after 4 September. I felt like the building was sick and that it wasn't safe. In aftershocks I would always go to the nearest doorframe. I would do that even if I was seeing clients, which was a bit embarrassing if they were trauma clients who I supposed to be helping to calm. I always said jokingly words to the effect that at least they could see I was handling it worse than they were.

Demolition on adjoining site

10. The building on the western side of the CTV building was demolished after the 4 September earthquake. I think this was the Injury Solutions building. There was machinery about all the time. The CTV building moved a lot as a result of the demolition and it was very difficult to do trauma counselling when the building was moving as much as it was.
11. I was very alarmed about the demolition because I believed the eastern wall of the Injury Solutions building was joined to the western wall of the CTV building. When they pulled on the adjoining wall it felt like the CTV building was being pulled as well. It made the whole of the CTV building shudder.
12. Following the removal of the adjoining wall the movement in the building felt worse. In aftershocks the building seemed to sway a lot more and it just felt weaker. In the bigger aftershocks file cabinets would fly across the room and bookcases would fall down. These were later bolted down. I had a sense that the swaying was a north-west to south-east movement, so the building was swaying on a diagonal. I remember this

because I would always stand under the same doorframe and can remember the sensation of moving in that direction.

13. We knew when the demolition workers were on tea breaks because there was no shaking.
14. It made me think that our building was suffering a lot of stress and that it was not safe. My nerves were strained and I noticed a high degree of irritability outside of my job. It was a very stressful time.

After Boxing Day 2010

15. After the Boxing Day earthquake I noticed that one of the pillars was cracked. This was outside the lifts. I have marked this as "2" on the plan. I can't be sure it was a result of the Boxing Day earthquake, but I didn't notice it before then. I noticed it about two or three weeks before the 22 February earthquake. I remember telling my husband about it when he picked me up one day. I pointed it out to him and told him that it was new.
16. I remember that there were cracks in the foyer area that got worse over time. I remember wondering whether they were just surface cracks or something more. I pointed the cracks out to my husband. He told me not to worry because they appeared to be just superficial. I remember hoping that somebody was doing something about all the damage I had seen.
17. Two or three days before the 22 February earthquake holes were drilled along the outside window ledge of the 5th floor. I believed they were drilling holes to insert hooks for safety harnesses to hold painters who were going to paint the outside skirting. When the drilling was going on the whole building vibrated.
18. The building just seemed to be under constant stress.
19. We were told the building had been checked by an engineer after Boxing Day and it was safe to occupy. This was told to us in a staff meeting by management but I can't be sure exactly when. I never saw any engineers going through the building.
20. I had heard lots of comments that the building was the best building to be in and was the safest in Christchurch. I believe this message was originally passed to staff from

someone in Relationship Services management. I am not sure who told them. We were told the movement we were experiencing was what you would expect because the building was built on rollers, like Te Papa, and was meant to move in earthquakes. Apparently it was purpose built to deal with earthquakes and I repeated that many times to reassure clients. We were told not to worry, but I was worried.

21. At staff meetings some of us would ask if we could temporarily relocate to another building because we felt unsafe. Management eventually agreed to move location at the end of the lease, which was a year away. I understand that they were responding not only to the discomfort felt in the building but because we were growing and needed bigger rooms.
22. I did not personally ask to see any reports on the building after either the 4 September or Boxing Day earthquakes.

22 February 2011

23. On the morning of 22 February I could not use my normal counselling room because of the noise and vibration of machinery flattening the ground next door. A client had made a comment about the noise so we changed rooms. I have marked my room as “3” on the plan. It was making our whole building vibrate but the movement was particularly bad on the western side of the building and that is why we moved. I have marked the counselling room we moved to as “4” on the plan.
24. At 12.00 I had cultural supervision with nine other counsellors from Relationship Services. We were in a meeting room in the south-west corner of the building. I have marked this meeting room as “5” on the Plan. In the room with me were Andy Winchester, Betty Inglewood, Anne Malcolm, Liz Cammock, Angela Osborne, Pip Randy, Quinn Tan, David Millar, Louise Tankesley, our supervisor, and her eight month old baby. We did not have any clients at that time.
25. Usually meetings were held in a group room in the middle of our premises but on 22 February someone suggested that we have our meeting in the room on the corner, which had recently been vacated by our manager. If we had been in the room in the middle of the floor I don't think we would have survived.

26. Pablo Godoy was in his office and Liz Ford was in the kitchen. Nina Bishop and Christine Hunt were at reception. There were two clients in the waiting area, one with two young children.
27. I recall that I was very hungry and could hardly focus. I was thinking about going to get something to eat from my bag which was in the counsellors' room across the corridor. Fortunately I did not leave the room I was in because a second later the earthquake hit.
28. I felt a vertical jolt. It almost propelled me off my seat upwards. There was a clear path between myself and the door so I immediately ran to the door so I could stand under its frame. I was there within a second. It was just a flimsy doorframe with an aluminium frame. Angela joined me straightaway, so the two of us were under the doorframe. The others were still sitting down.
29. As I reached the doorframe there was another really sharp jolt from underneath. The floor lifted underneath me. And the next thing the ceiling caved in and everything began to collapse. It happened so fast. The movement was up and down initially then sideways. It was very noisy and the jolts were very hard. The insulation from the ceiling came down. I was under the frame so nothing landed directly on my head.
30. I could feel us going down, but it wasn't a freefall. I could feel that we were on a slope and felt a downward movement at the same time. The slope was to the south, and the building seemed to be twisting anticlockwise.
31. It is hard to say how long the shaking went on for. It didn't feel as long as the September one, just sharper and more violent. It certainly went on for some time, but I can't be sure how long.
32. I was facing east and didn't see what was happening in the room behind me.
33. It happened in stages, collapse, collapse, collapse, collapse, then there was a bit of a jolt and then we stopped. It felt like being in an elevator when you reach the ground floor. It suddenly stopped and that is when I looked around and saw a lot of dust and people getting up from the ground. There was mess everywhere. At this point I was still standing holding onto the doorframe. The first thing I noticed was that something sharp had gone into my right knee and there was blood coming out.

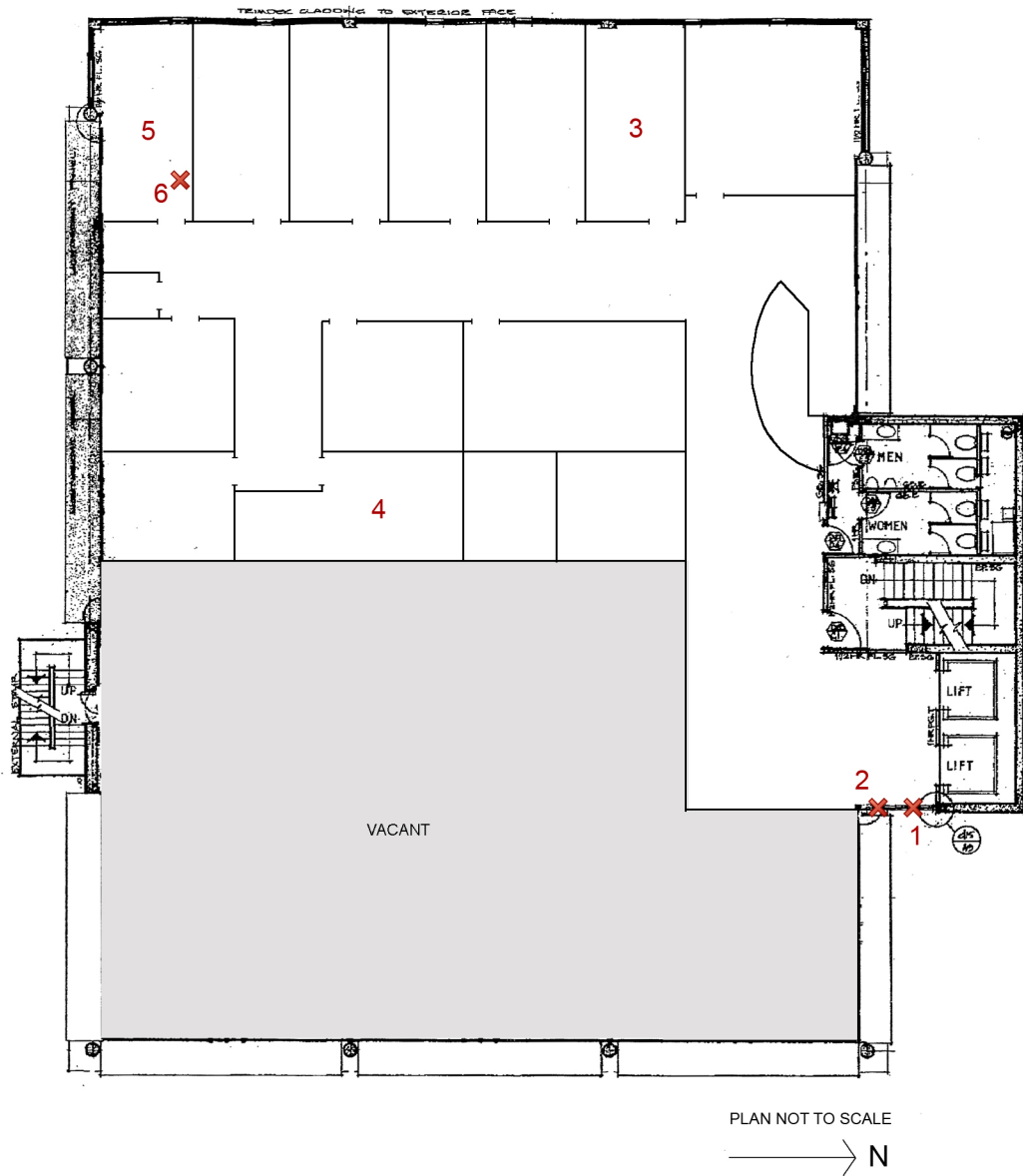
34. The way out of the door was blocked and my first thought was how I was going to get out. I could see that the outside walls had collapsed inwards. The internal walls were the only ones still remaining.
35. There was a filing cabinet in the room which had been bolted to the wall. I have marked this as "6" on the plan. I think this was what cut my knee during the earthquake. It must have fallen in a south-east direction.
36. I believe that the building collapsed in the south-east corner. That is just the way I perceived it then, because of the way the floor was tilting, and the way I still look at it now.
37. The next thing I recall is being able to see blue sky through an opening in the roof. Rescuers came and opened up the hole wider and I was able to escape. I was so surprised to see we were only about a metre off the ground.
38. The first aftershock I felt was one outside the building. It was very strong and I saw the IRD building moving significantly. The aftershocks continued. I went to Latimer Square.
39. I did not smell or see any smoke. I believe the fire started later. I didn't realise the building was on fire until I was at Latimer Square and could see the smoke billowing. I believe the fire broke out after my escape.

Signed: 

NILGUN KULPE

Date: 

"A"



249 MADRAS ST - LEVEL 6

KEY

1. Crack along the wall
2. Crack in the pillar
3. My room
4. Meeting room
5. Meeting room
6. Filing cabinet