

Eight years without Sophia



**MARIJE
SLIJKERMAN**



Sophia Koetsier

Tomorrow, October 28, is the day that will, mercilessly, tell us that it is eight years ago that our Sophia Koetsier disappeared in Uganda.

To us it still feels like a few months ago that we took her to the Amsterdam airport, with her brand new backpack and her equally new hiking boots. One of those boots would be found two months later, along the bank of the River Nile.

Sophia had effortlessly acquired her Bachelor of Medicine in the early summer of 2015 and was excited about working as an intern in a Kampala hospital. She enjoyed her work there, her colleagues and the country, as we read every week in her lengthy emails. After finishing her internship, she went on a trip through Uganda with two fellow students.

On day six of her journey she disappeared, in Murchison Falls National Park, the darkest day in our life. The day our life fell apart.

Circumstances are unclear, investigations left a lot to be desired and it was quickly assumed Sophia must have fallen victim to a fatal accident. Evidence pointing in that direction was never found.

We are not alone in believing there is more here than meets the eye, including people who know more.

Left to fend for ourselves, I have kept travelling back to Uganda, desperately trying to find answers and fill in the many gaps, left by authorities in two countries. I still do.

Early last year, departing director of Criminal Investigations Directorate Grace Akullo mentioned several unresolved high priority cases on television, including Sophia's.

Shortly after, in April, her successor, Tom Magambo, formed an investigative team and requested us to give him three months/90 days to come with a report. So we waited. And waited some more.

In December, a Dutch-made television film about Sophia and her mysterious disappearance was broadcast on Ugandan television at 10:00pm. A well-researched and carefully made news item was to air around 9:30 pm, to serve as an introduction.

Home in Amsterdam, we were watching the television channel's livestream on YouTube, waiting for the item.

Unfortunately, it was in vain. We learned later that the Police had requested the channel to not air the item. They objected to the line that, until then, no findings of

the investigation had been shared with the family. However, this was a fact and we were very confused about this.

This year, in June, I was finally able to read a draft report. It was clear that quite some activity had taken place but still, the report seemed to produce more questions than answers, and leaned heavily towards the fatal accident scenario.

This month, on my 24th trip, I received a regular report which seems to take that same direction. We are still in the process of studying it closely.

Clearly, finding the truth is not easy.

In an ideal world people would always be honest and truthful. But our world is not ideal and one cannot simply believe everything someone says. People can, and will, withhold information for all kinds of reasons.

Thorough digging and probing is inevitable to get to the bottom of things.

Dutch police research into why certain cold cases eventually did get solved, showed that in 40% of cases this happened because people started talking.

Either they finally found the courage, or police never spoke to them, or they were simply not asked the right questions.

This seems quite relevant here too and we have no other option than to keep fighting to find out what happened to our smart, kind-hearted and beautiful Sophia.

We remain deeply grateful to all those wonderful people who keep supporting us and encourage us not to give up and maintain hope. We can use all the help we can get.

To those of you reading this and seeing us as easy prey to extort money from; please do not waste your time, nor ours. We are not rich, we cannot get you a work permit in Europe and rewards are paid after a missing person has been found, not before.

A few articles have recently been published about Sophia's disappearance, both in Dutch and American media. Please visit www.findSophia.org. Also for the link to the documentary.

**The writer is the mother of
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