

Ten years without Sophia



reason, I have pleaded for a long time for one, or two, really sharp and motivated investigators who could quietly gather information without attracting unwanted attention.

Late last year it seemed like my plea had finally been heard and I hoped we might see some answers, at last, to our many questions. Unfortunately, that hope fell apart within months.

Regrettably, this was not the first time this happened. Time and time again, I have met people who seemed genuinely concerned, were in a position to help and showed a willingness to do so. But often the communication halted soon after it started, without explanation. Frustrating, painful and incomprehensible. Despite it all, I will continue to walk every road that unfolds itself in front of me, to see if it will lead closer to Sophia. Thus far I have walked many dead-end roads, full of obstacles.

The story of Sophia's vanishing is too strange and has too many loose ends.

We cannot, and will not give up on our bright, beautiful and gifted girl, who is deeply missed by many people. Time does not heal all wounds.

On the contrary; this wound only seems to become bigger and more painful. It dominates the mind during the day and keeps us awake at night. No child is as present as a missing child. The insecurity about Sophia's fate is devastating, as every parent of a missing child will know.

We are grateful to those who do keep communicating and help us where they can, and for the continuous international media attention. Sophia must not be forgotten.

A Dutch non-governmental organisation, active in solving cold cases, is offering a euro 10,000 reward to the person who can give the definitive tip that will lead to Sophia's whereabouts.

More information: www.findSophia.org

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Today, Tuesday, October 28, will be just a regular weekday for most of you. Take the children to school, go to work, the usual.

For us, a Dutch family, this day, again, is a harsh reminder that 10 years ago, an unimaginable nightmare started.

This day marks 10 years without our beloved Sophia, last seen in Paraa in Murchison Falls National Park. Her whereabouts remain a mystery to this day.

Sophia, a bright medical student, had come to Uganda to work as an intern in Lubaga Hospital in Kampala for eight weeks. From her weekly reports it was clear she was enjoying her stay, work and her colleagues.

After the internship she went on a two-week trip around the country with two fellow students and a local guide.

On day six, October 28, 2015, she disappeared. The circumstances are unclear. Authorities quickly, conveniently and without evidence, assumed: 'Fatal accident'. It is our belief that a serious and thorough investigation has never taken place and many questions remain.

The initial investigation was genuinely flawed, as several authorities have acknowledged since.

'It's clear to me this case has not been taken seriously and it has been kept at a local level far too long,' according to Gen.

Jeje Odongo, several years later, when Minister of Internal Affairs.

It took more than four years before a new investigation was launched. Unfortunately, this was derailed by the COVID-19 pandemic that took over the world shortly after.

Another investigation was started in the spring of 2022. Despite having shared a trove of useful information that I had gathered myself, the Criminal Investigation Department declined to involve me. Instead, I was promised that after three months we would receive a report. In practice, we were kept in the dark for 18 months before receiving a report. It was quite underwhelming. The morning after Sophia's disappearance, one item was found that belonged to her. Very near that same location, but more than 24 hours later, a whole trail of items was found, on Friday October 30.

This was the day I arrived at the so-called scene of crime. I vividly recall being mystified by seeing these puzzling items, spread out along the bank of the Nile river over a distance of some 40 metres. A strong feeling of something being amiss immediately took hold of me. That feeling has never left. Like the feeling that there are people who know more. For that