

# MODERN ACTIVISM

WITH SOPHIE WALKER

'In a country where homosexuality is illegal, we're making sure LGBT refugees are safe'

In our regular column, Sophie Walker, feminist campaigner and author of *Five Rules For Rebellion: Let's Change The World Ourselves*, spotlights women fighting for change. This week, she talks to Sally Jackson, 57, who lives in Portsmouth and is a volunteer for FiLiA, a feminist movement with a focus on amplifying the voices of women who are silenced. They chatted during Pride month about Sally's work supporting refugee women from the LGBT community in Kenya's Kakuma camp.

**Have you always had an activist mindset?**

My work life has always included activism. My day job is working for Standing Together, which helps organisations to better support women who have experienced domestic abuse.

**So how did you find FiLiA?**

About seven years ago, I heard there was a feminist conference and that was exciting to me – so I went and I was blown away by the variety of aspects of feminism that were talked about. I contacted the organisers and said, 'Can I come and play too, please?'

**And what did they get you to do?**

All sorts. We were approached by one of our volunteers who was working as a counsellor in Kenya's Kakuma camp to tell us what was happening.

**And what is happening in the camp?**

Kakuma is one of the few refugee camps in Africa that accepts those who are LGBT. It operates in a country where homosexuality is illegal and the information we were getting was that there was a lot of physical and emotional abuse in the camp and women were not being supported by the local police, health services or the UNHCR that runs the camp. We got in touch with the camp leaders and asked to speak directly to the women,



Sally Jackson

who were mostly Ugandan and had been forced into marriage before escaping with their children. They don't have enough food or medication. There is not enough room for all of the LGBT refugees to sleep inside the block they have been assigned, so some have to sleep outside. Because the whole community is in the same block, they are obvious targets. Many women have been raped just going to the camp shop. Medics refused to treat some of them because they are gay.

**How are you helping and how can we help?**

We are asking for them to be evacuated to a place of safety and given official refugee status so they can live their lives. *Grazia* readers can donate to our GoFundMe page [see below] to support them with food and shelter and they can use our template letters to write to the Foreign Office and to UNHCR.

**Finally, who supports you while you support these women?**

The sisterhood within the team is one of the huge benefits of being part of FiLiA. We are about 80 volunteers. The work can be difficult but getting support from each other and from other backers helps make us feel able to continue. They hold you up, and you stand up for them. Women's strength is immeasurable.

*For information and template letters visit [filia.org.uk](http://filia.org.uk). To donate to the LGBT refugees in Kakuma camp, scan this page or go to: [bit.ly/KakumaCampFundraiser](http://bit.ly/KakumaCampFundraiser)*

