

Warwick Stories: Attending the Srebrenica Youth



Picture of the 3rd Edition of the Srebrenica Youth School (SYS22)

On the 5th July 2022, I flew to Bosnia for the start of the week-long Srebrenica Youth School (SYS 22) which was due to start the next day. Having only been selected two weeks earlier, I was of course excited to attend and meet the other participants. But I would be lying if at the same time I didn't admit that at the time I was anxious about the trip ahead of me.

My anxiety stemmed from the fact that whilst I knew the SYS22 was sure to be an enriching program for youth interested in peace-building, transitional justice and human rights, given that it was centred around the Srebrenica Genocide, it was undoubtedly going to be a difficult and emotional experience carrying the full weight of history.

While in many ways my assessment proved to be accurate – this was certainly the case when hearing testimonies from victims and those who lost loved ones – the experience proved to be rewarding. By this I mean to say that while nothing prepares you for hearing these stories - stories of mass graves being uncovered, of ethnic cleansing and of mass rape – only by hearing these stories can you begin to comprehend the suffering that happened in Bosnia and what needs to be done for justice to be delivered to the victims.

Now for a summary of my trip:

6th July: Firstly, we headed to the 'Sarajevo Tunnel of Hope' where we learned more about the Siege of Sarajevo and how the citizens of Sarajevo built an underground tunnel to avoid the Serb snipers. Prior to our 3-hour journey to Srebrenica we also headed to the Sarajevo Memorial Centre to hear from experts on the Siege and the lead up to the war.

7th – 8th July: Toured the former UN compound in Srebrenica, and heard from survivors and academics on issues of transitional justice and the prevalent trend of genocide denialism among Bosnian Serb politicians.

9th July: After another day of panel sessions, the SYS22 built the Mother's Scarf art installation in preparation for the Srebrenica Heroines exhibition (and conference) the following day.

10th July: Dedicated to the 'Mothers of Srebrenica', the 10th was a day jam-packed with several high-level officials including the Dutch Defence Minister, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights and many others attending the Srebrenica Heroines Conference. Throughout the four dialogue sessions SYS22 participants learned about the Genocide and how the brave Mothers of Srebrenica were instrumental in securing justice for their perished loved ones.

11th July: On the 27th anniversary of the Srebrenica Genocide, the SYS22 gathered inside the Srebrenica Memorial Centre to witness the yearly commemorative service and watch as the remains of 50 recently-discovered bodies were buried. No words can describe the pain and insight this experience brought each and every participant of the SYS22.

12th July: Spent the day in reflecting on the side of the River Drina.

13th July: Returned to Sarajevo to mark the end of the SYS22.

Had it not been for the University of Warwick and their generous offer of this bursary, not only would I have been unable to attend this year's amazing Youth School and learn about the pressing issue of transitional justice; but I would have missed out on a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to directly hear and learn from victims of genocide on the need to combat intolerance through education.

Last but not least, I am also extremely thankful to the Post-Conflict Research Centre who along with the Srebrenica Memorial Centre organised this fantastic program and provided us with the invaluable opportunity to be educated on this issue directly where it happened.

All in all, SYS22 proved to be extremely rewarding experience, and one I'm confident I will never forget!

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