

Minor Celebrity in Sharm el Sheikh

Two Headliners members attended an international youth peace forum in Egypt to speak about the relationship between young people and the media. Here Tara writes about her experience.

To tell you the truth, I wasn't really sure what was going to happen when we got to Egypt, despite all the preparation we had done beforehand. I knew I was going to the International Youth Forum on the Power of Youth for Peace (1-3 September), and I was going to be speaking there about Headliners and the relationship between the media and young people, but it hadn't registered yet.



The forum was hosted by an organisation headed by the First Lady of Egypt called the Suzanne Mubarak Women's International Peace Movement and was held in Sharm el Sheikh, a more touristy part of Egypt. The conference was supposed to be about working with young people to create peace, but I had no idea how that was going to work, or if anyone was going to listen to anything I said.

When we touched down in Cairo, I saw my name on a placard, and I was well chuffed! The whole stay was generally luxurious - my hotel room was bigger than my university flat. It was fab but it did make me wonder who was paying for all of this. We had lots of freebies given to us, but we also sacrificed a lot through the heavy security presence which stopped us doing proper interviews (we weren't allowed to take any cameras or dictaphones into the conference).

As speakers Nina and I were granted this special status which meant we also had lots of people talking to us. However, as youth at this conference were defined as 18-30 year-olds, and most of them were older, we were probably the youngest speakers there. It also made me wonder if it was really a youth friendly conference after all if under-18s were barely represented. Wouldn't this sort of exclusion hinder peace?

On the day of our session, (titled Is the Media Youth Friendly?), I was sick with nerves. I had only felt this with my A-levels, and was worried how I was going to perform - whether I was going to remember anything I had prepared, or just stumble and mutter. Yet, when it came to the actual session all of my nervousness evaporated and I spoke freely as if I was in another discussion with my friends, only this time with cameras trained on me! It was fantastic.



I managed to get my main point across, that young people deserve to be heard on an equal platform. They don't deserve to be patronised by people trying to be "awesome" or "cool", they simply deserve to be able to say 'this is my point of view and I need you to listen'. Unfortunately, the session was over way too soon for any questions from the audience to be properly scrutinised.

And I think people really listened too. I had people come up to me, really interested in what I had to say, interested in Headliners and my own work. It made me feel really proud of myself and like a minor celebrity. There were also many other people with different viewpoints to mine, and so many amazing projects out there in which young people are the catalyst to making a difference where they live.

I learned that these conferences, outside of cheesy tree-planting and hippie-singing, are really about sharing ideas with people you may never otherwise meet, and being pushed out of your comfort zone. It's also been really encouraging in terms of getting more politically active locally, which can in the end bring about a change globally. My cynical brain tends to see conferences as extravagant talking shops, but this one may just buck the trend if people are motivated enough.

About this article

This article was written by Tara Brown, aged 19, from London. She attended the conference with [Nina Osei-Armah](#).

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