

The Worldwide Ireland Funds Annual Conference held in Northern Ireland for first time in almost 40 years signalling the organisation's ongoing commitment to the Peace Process.

Thursday June 19th, 2014

Over 120 philanthropists from around the world are gathered today in Belfast to attend the Annual Conference of the Worldwide Ireland Funds. This is the first time in almost four decades that the event takes place in its entirety in Northern Ireland.

Delegates have travelled from 22 cities in 9 countries including the US, Australia, Singapore and China. All are committed philanthropists who are already supporting the charity sector in Ireland, North and South.

Proceedings commenced last night at a welcome dinner hosted by the Secretary of State in Hillsborough Castle with a piano performance by Claire Bowes who was blinded by the Omagh bombing in 1998.

Commenting, Kieran McLoughlin President and CEO of The Worldwide Ireland Funds, said "Though the Peace Process has slipped from the radar of many, our coming here represents our commitment to doing our bit to bringing it to a successful conclusion. The Peace Process is just that, a process not an event and all of us - governments, civic society and philanthropists - must remain focused on achieving a normalised society in Northern Ireland".

In addition to announcing the winners of the Ireland Funds Business Plan Competition, the Funds also announced a gift of \$1 million to Co-Operation Ireland to support its work especially in hard to reach communities. This is part of the \$16 million that the Funds have distributed in grants across the island of Ireland so far this year.

Throughout today donors and supporters will visit a sample of the many projects assisted by The Worldwide Ireland Funds in Northern Ireland. These include: the 174 Trust, Ardoyne Holycross Boxing Club, Cinemagic, Integrated Education Northern Ireland, the Linen Hall Library, Play Resource, Queen's University Belfast, SOS Bus Northern Ireland, The Lyric Theatre, Young Enterprise Northern Ireland, and Young Social Innovators. Tonight they will dine as guests of the First Minister and deputy First Minister at Stormont Castle.

Tomorrow, Friday, The Worldwide Ireland Funds Plenary Session will discuss the Funds' priorities and how its donors best meet ongoing need in Ireland North and South. Tomorrow night, there will be a Gala Dinner held in the Titanic Centre at which the American Ireland Fund AWB Vincent Literary Award will be presented to celebrated poet, Leontia Flynn including a €25,000 bursary.

On Saturday, delegates will be taken on a guided tour of Antrim's North Coast where they will visit the Giant's Causeway and the Corrymeela Community. The Conference concludes with a Dinner at Mount Stewart House & Gardens, voted one of the top 10 gardens in the world.

For further information, please contact:

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About The Worldwide Ireland Funds

The Worldwide Ireland Funds are a philanthropic network across 12 countries that has raised over \$480 million for worthy causes in Ireland and Irish causes around the world. It is the largest network of friends of Ireland dedicated to supporting programs of peace and reconciliation, arts and culture, education and community development. Founded in 1976, The Worldwide Ireland Funds have benefited over 3,000 organizations. Funds raised are contributed by private philanthropists and organizations.

In response to the severe downturn in the Irish economy, The Worldwide Ireland Funds launched the *Promising Ireland Campaign* in 2009 to raise \$100 million for charities experiencing an increased demand for their services at a time of a major reduction in resources. Thanks to the extraordinary generosity of donors, the initial goal has been exceeded and the target has been doubled to now raise \$200 million. As a result, one third of the Funds' total earnings since foundation have been raised during the five years of the Campaign. Over 650 outstanding projects and organizations have received support from the *Promising Ireland Campaign*.

The largest chapter, The American Ireland Fund, holds a 4-star rating from Charity Navigator in recognition of efficiency, sound fiscal management and commitment to accountability and transparency.

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