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World leaders of tomorrow to be nurtured at prestigious conference

by Ciarán D'Arcy

A summer's afternoon on the capital's main street provided the perfect backdrop for the launch of the **Foróige** Albert Schweitzer Leadership for Life youth conference taking place in Maynooth this week.

A multitude of hand-held flags were aflutter as representatives from diverse nations such as Nigeria, Palestine, and India gathered under the spire for an introductory photo-shoot with Hollywood star and ambassador for the event Matt McCoy.

Speaking about the leadership conference, former *LA Confidential* and *Police Academy* actor McCoy commended the young leaders on show: "The potential leaders of the future are right in front of you here," said McCoy. "We've got kids from Nigeria, the US, Canada, Britain, India. These kids have already been identified as leaders in their own countries so we bring them here and try to nurture those great qualities that they already have.

"Leadership is about motivating others and leading by example. Everything that they're going to learn this week, they're going to take that back to their communities and lead by example."

This year marks the fourth annual installment of the event, which will see 270 "potential future world leaders" congregate in Kildare's university town to hear from speakers such as presidential candidate Seán Gallagher and Cork's own Joanne O'Riordan.

Ms O'Riordan, a 16-year-old from Millstreet, shot to fame when addressing a United Nations conference in New York in April on her use of technology to overcome the obstacles posed by a medical condition which left her without limbs.

Among the attendees yesterday was 18-year-old Palestinian Amro Alashi, who had to endure a tortuous journey from his troubled homeland in order to be present.

"It took us three days to get here between crossing borders by car,

bus and airplane, so it wasn't easy getting here," said Alashi. "I got involved because I'm quite good at socialising, so the principal of my school chose me to represent Palestine so I could represent our culture in the right way that it deserves to be depicted in."

Also present was Mark Gallagher from Blanchardstown.

"Now more than ever it's the key to what we need in life. The people that are affected most by the decisions made by today's Government are the young people, so I believe that young leaders who have initiatives should push to make decisions and help to become a leader, which will inevitably benefit the country," said the 17-year-old Blanchardstown native.

Foróige — Ireland's largest youth organisation working with 64,000 young people annually to develop values such as citizenship, entrepreneurship and leadership — teamed up with the Albert Schweitzer Foundation (named after the Nobel peace prize winner) in 2009 to set up their prestigious leadership programme from which the 270 youths will graduate on Thursday.