



New York  
**Irish Center**  
Community Is Our Culture

# IRELAND TODAY 2022

## INAUGURAL AMERICA-IRELAND YOUTH CONFERENCE

FRIDAY-SUNDAY, MAY 20-22  
VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

MEDIA PARTNER

**IrishCentral.**

Conference Coordinators:  
Hannah Ciesil & Ryan McNally



**Government of Ireland**  
Emigrant Support Programme



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála  
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

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Northern Ireland Executive  
North America



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George C. Heslin  
*Executive Director*

Dear Friends,

On behalf of the Board of Directors at **New York Irish Center** I would like to welcome you to the inaugural **America Ireland Youth Conference 2022**.

**Board of Directors**

For 17 years New York Irish Center has shared its interdisciplinary programs with the Irish community and beyond. Each year we welcome 20,000 guests to our center, which is located just one stop from Grand Central Station here in New York City.

*Executive Board*

Sean Mackin  
*Chair*

As we embark on the inaugural America Ireland Youth Conference it gives me great pleasure to thank my colleagues Ryan McNally, Hannah Ciesil, and Stephen Long who have planned every detail of this three-day event.

Colm Reilly  
*Treasurer*

Pauline O'Brien  
*Deputy Treasurer*

I would like to welcome and thank participants from 11 colleges and universities across Ireland and the United States.

Corina Galvin  
*Secretary*

As we emerge from the pandemic, it is even more important that we continue to have and, indeed, rebuild the transatlantic conversation that exists between our two great nations. The America-Ireland Youth Conference was created to inspire, connect, challenge, unite, and engage the next generation of entrepreneurs, thinkers, and global leaders. The topics we have chosen to discuss--Gender Violence, The Value of Peace, and Global Warming--are crucial, urgent matters of our time.

Michael Breslin  
Sean Downes

**Board Members**

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Mary Meegan  
Bridget Mitchell  
Paul O'Brien  
Michael O'Sullivan  
Breda Prendergast

I would like to thank our distinguished moderators Nisha Varia, Sarah Crowe, and Claire Byrne, who have worked with some of the most important agencies across the globe tackling these issues daily, including Human Rights Watch, The United Nations, UNICEF, UNESCO, and The Green Party Ireland.

I would like to thank our media partners Irish Central.com. We are deeply grateful for the support of The Irish Government & Department of Foreign Affairs, Emigrant Support Program and The Northern Ireland Bureau, both of whom we thank for supporting and believing in the vision and hope for this annual conference.

I invite you to dive into the exhilarating America-Ireland Youth Conference 2022.



George C. Heslin  
Executive Director  
New York Irish Center

**Oifig an Aire Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Aire Cosanta**  
Office of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence



George C. Heslin  
New York Irish Center  
1040 Jackson Ave  
Queens, NY 11101  
United States

16 May 2022

Dear Participants,

I am pleased to congratulate the New York Irish Center, moderators, panellists and participants on the occasion of the inaugural America-Ireland Youth Conference – Ireland Today 2022. This conference brings together policy-makers, educators and students from both Ireland and the United States to address important topics: gender-based violence, global conflicts, and climate change.

Throughout the course of this conference, you will participate in crucial and timely discussions, highlighting some of the most significant issues we face today. Whether it be addressing the root causes – and potential solutions – to gender-based violence, understanding today’s global conflicts through the lens of the Irish Peace Process, among others, or examining the realities of climate change and the parts we must play in combatting it urgently, I believe that this conference – and all of you participating in it – have ideas and suggestions that can help us reach closer to solutions.

You represent a group of educators, researchers and advocates who are already demonstrating admirable leadership in your fields. I encourage you, as you work together to find solutions to these problems, to also take the opportunity to create meaningful personal connections that will endure beyond these few days and form the basis for lasting friendships and partnerships between Ireland and the United States.

I hope that this inaugural America-Ireland Youth Conference will be the first of many and I look forward to hearing more on the outcome of your discussions over the coming days. Allow me to conclude by sending my best wishes to the New York Irish Center, its moderators, panellists, and this year’s participants for a rewarding and stimulating series of discussions.

Yours sincerely,

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Simon Coveney TD  
Minister for Foreign Affairs and  
Minister for Defence



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May 18, 2022

Dear George,

I want to thank the New York Irish Centre for their foresight and determination in launching this Inaugural America-Ireland Youth Conference.

The topics for each panel discussion are some of the most crucial we face in the world today. This conference creates opportunities for conversations to happen across the Atlantic and allow best practice and lessons learned to be shared amongst policy makers, students and thought leaders. The conference will include contributions from Northern Irish academics and will importantly consider the lessons arising from successful peace-building in Northern Ireland.

I also want to thank all of those involved for giving their time and expertise to the conference. The value of international partnerships and conversations between universities on these issues is huge.

I hope you all have a rewarding and successful conference and that connections made here will continue for many years to come.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Elliott  
Director/Counselor  
Northern Ireland Bureau



# DAY 1

## GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: A ROAD TO UNDERSTANDING

MODERATED BY NISHA VARIA

FRIDAY, MAY 20, 1PM

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Identify the causes of gender-based violence in American and Irish cultures and forge a road to solutions.



**Nisha Varia** is an experienced human rights investigator, author, advocate, and trainer who has worked in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and North America. Her specializations include gender discrimination and violence, labor, migration, corporate accountability, and trainings on human rights methodologies. Varia was advocacy director of Human Rights Watch's women's rights division between 2015 and 2022 and a researcher between 2003 and 2014. At Human Rights Watch she conducted extensive research and advocacy to promote migrant domestic workers' rights across Asia and the Middle East. Her advocacy contributed to the adoption and promotion of three international labor treaties on domestic workers' rights, forced labor, and violence and harassment at work. Varia develops and leads trainings on human rights research and advocacy methodologies, including techniques for interviewing survivors of trauma and gender-based violence. Varia taught a postgraduate seminar on human rights research and advocacy at the New School between 2012 and 2018. Before joining Human Rights Watch, Varia worked at the International Center for Research on Women and was a Fulbright scholar to India. Varia received a master's degree in economic and political development from Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs and a bachelor's degree in economics and anthropology from Stanford University.

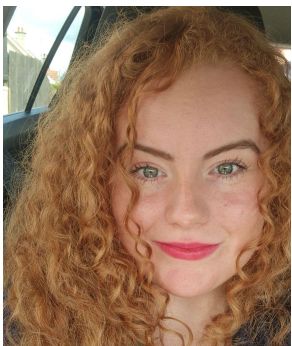


**Kyle Friedler** is currently a Graduate student at the University of Illinois Chicago studying Public Administration with a Concentration in Nonprofit Management. Kyle graduated from Loyola Marymount University in the spring of 2021 with a BA in Sociology and a Double Minor in Women's and Gender Studies

and Film, Television, and Media Studies. In 2019 and 2021, Kyle won LMU's Student Sociology Journal's Best Paper Award for his research "Experience in the University: Comparing Women in Liberal Arts and STEM," and his senior thesis, "Pandemic Privilege: Business Policies and Labor Value During COVID-19." He was also awarded an Honors Summer Research Grant and a RAINS Undergraduate Research Fellowship to pursue a creative research project over the summer of 2020. Writing a play titled *We Need You to Come In*, Kyle combined intersections of media and social issues facing people during the COVID-19 pandemic. Starting graduate school in the fall of 2021, Kyle is also a member of the Division I Cross Country and Track and Field Teams at UIC. You can find him running along the lakefront or working at Fleet Feet most days of the week.



**Raven Hodges** (he/him) is a research analyst at Southern Poverty Law Center, currently covering the anti-LGBTQ movement out of the Intelligence Project. He has 7 years of experience in monitoring hate and far-right extremism. Hodges pushed for the collapsing of the Black Separatist category from the SPLC Hate Map, authoring *Equity Through Accuracy: Changes to Our Hate Map*, to explain the rationale for this change and to make way for the new Antisemitism listing. He currently is working on a new report regarding the anti-LGBTQ movement.



**Róisín Keenan** (she/her) is a second year undergraduate student at Queen's University Belfast studying History and International Relations. She has been the Feminist and Equality Society Events Officer and has recently been elected as the new incoming President. The drive for feminist change in our wider society and nation is her main passion and she is delighted to be a part of this panel.



**Stephanie Nilva, Esq.** (she/her) has been working in the domestic violence field throughout her career, and has been the Executive Director of Day One since its inception. As an attorney, Stephanie practiced family and matrimonial law, specializing in domestic abuse. Immediately following law school, Stephanie was the recipient of a New York State IOLA Legal Services Fellowship designed to provide community education and direct representation in response to domestic violence in the Orthodox Jewish community. Following her work in New York at both Legal Services for New York – Brooklyn Branch and New York Legal Assistance Group, Stephanie became the Acting Director and Managing Attorney at Community Law Center in Oakland,

California. During her time in California, Stephanie also provided direct representation to clients in family law proceedings throughout Alameda County. Stephanie returned to New York and became the Executive Director of Legal Information for Families Today (LIFT), an organization devoted to helping individuals navigate the New York City child welfare and family court systems. Stephanie graduated from the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law where she was involved in various public interest activities. She was a Senior Editor of the Cardozo Arts & Entertainment Law Journal and a member of Cardozo's Bet Tzedek Legal Services Clinic. Upon her graduation, Stephanie received the Jonathan A. Weiss Award for Public Interest. As an alumna, Stephanie was recognized by the school with an award presented to graduates for distinguished public service activities. Born and raised in New York City, Stephanie graduated from Hamilton College with a Bachelor of Arts. She is admitted to the State Bars of New York, New Jersey and California.

# DAY 2

## SHIFTING LANDSCAPES: THE VALUE OF PEACE

MODERATED BY SARAH CROWE

SATURDAY, MAY 21, 1PM

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Touch on global conflicts and discuss how peace can be achieved by reflecting on the Irish Peace Process.



**Sarah Crowe** is a Moderator, Writer, Strategist, and Senior Advisor/Consultant for UN Communications. In 2022 she helped craft a major UNESCO Global Report on the impact of Covid on the cultural sector. She previously lead on Convening at the UNICEF Office of Research Innocenti in Florence where she moderated and organized the Leading Minds conferences with high-level panelists to interview children and young people on key issues of our time: mental health together with WHO in 2019, COVID-related content in 2020 and 2021 such as vaccine doses, distribution, and the great divide, online learning, climate change, and a special focus on Africa. At Innocenti in Florence, she managed the communication team, launched the Report Card

into Child Wellbeing, and advised the team of researchers. She helped rebrand Innocenti and produced a 10-part podcast on the Future of Childhood with global experts. Crowe previously worked as UNICEF's Chief of Crisis Communications and the Spokesperson for UNICEF's Executive Director, Anthony Lake, from 2015 to 2018 and as the Regional Chief of Communications in Delhi from 2008 to 2011. Before joining the UN, Crowe worked as an international journalist and has covered major global news and current affairs events such as the end of apartheid, the Mandela era, civil wars in DR Congo, Angola, and Somalia.



**Dr. Brendan Ciarán Browne** is an interdisciplinary scholar with an LL.B, LL.M (Law & Human Rights) and PhD in Sociology, all from Queen's University Belfast. He has previously held faculty positions at Queen's University



Belfast, and Al Quds (Bard) University, Palestine, where he taught Transitional Justice and the Laws of Armed Conflict. His research interests include conflict and transitional justice in Palestine, commemorating in conflict, conflict and forced displacement, conflict and resilience, and conducting research in conflict zones. He works predominantly around issues in Palestine where he spends time travelling regularly to conduct fieldwork. Dr Browne has published in top-ranking peer-reviewed journals, including: *Third World Quarterly*, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, and he has contributed op-eds in leading media outlets, including *The Irish Times*, *The Globe Post*, *The Newstatesman*, and *The Conversation*. Dr Browne's work has attracted significant research funding including from the Independent Social Research Foundation (ISRF), the Wellcome Trust, and most recently a research development grant from the Arts Humanities Research Council for a project entitled: 'Palestinian Bedouin at risk of forced displacement: IHL vulnerabilities, ICC possibilities', a project on which he is international Co-Investigator. Dr Browne is an award-winning teacher, having been nominated twice for the prestigious Provost's Teaching Award, winning the accolade in 2019. In addition, he has been nominated twice for his work on community engagement in Northern Ireland and Palestine, having been nominated twice (shortlisted in 2018) for the Trinity Civic Engagement Award. His most recent book (forthcoming in 2022) is entitled: 'Refugees and Forced Displacement in Northern Ireland's Troubles: Untold Journeys' which examines the legacy of those who were forced from their homes during the troubles in Northern Ireland. In addition, he is currently working on a monograph that examines the limitations of transitional justice in Palestine/Israel.



**Ryan Conner** is an M.A. student in European Studies at Georgetown University's Walsh School of Foreign Service and a 2021-22 Georgetown Global Irish Studies Research Fellow. He currently interns at the Washington Ireland Program and recently interned at the U.S. State Department. Ryan is primarily interested in the study and practice of diplomacy, and his graduate research will focus on the peace processes in Northern Ireland and Colombia. He previously published research on the politics and legacies of the civil rights movement in Derry. Ryan holds a B.A. in History and Public Policy, summa cum laude, from William & Mary. He speaks and writes in a personal capacity.



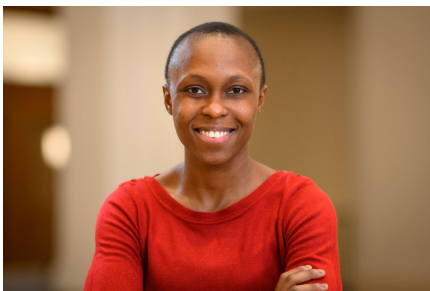
**Eóin Cummings** is a second-year undergraduate student, studying Politics at Queens University Belfast and the founder and President of the QUB Politics Society. He has worked on youth programs in the past such as the YMCA's Youth in Government Program and served as a member of the Lisburn and Castlereagh Youth Council. As President he has been extremely focused on giving young people a voice in politics and educating young

people on how they can bring about change and on politics more generally. Coming from the island of Ireland, politics has always been part of his life, particularly being born after the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, which has been instrumental in how every facet of his life operates. Moreover, as a member of the LGBTQ+ community and a disabled person the rights of minorities has been central to his political philosophy.



**Casey Donahue** earned an MA in History and an MS in Foreign Service from Georgetown University in May 2022. He specializes in memory, education, and peacebuilding in the Atlantic space. Casey is the author of a Masters thesis on the evolution of Irish American identities in a small Nebraska town, and he is currently writing a long-form comparison of youth history education and civil conflict remembrance in Liberia, Northern Ireland, and the United States. Casey speaks Arabic and has worked as a classroom teacher, political risk analyst, and elementary school tutor. He has published on diverse topics including funk music, Iranian opposition movements, Afghan women's education, and

sociolinguistics.



**Sarah Nanjala** is a Master of Global Affairs student at the University of Notre Dame, specializing in International Peace Studies. She is also a Political Affairs intern with the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission. Before her master's, Sarah was a print journalist for the Daily Nation, Kenya's largest independent newspaper, where she covered a wide range of national and global issues including elections in violence-prone areas and the

COVID-19 pandemic. Her work and research have been focused on finding ways to prevent conflict and achieve sustainable peace and development, first as a journalist and now as a peace practitioner. She aspires to make a meaningful and direct change in people's lives, particularly those affected by conflict, poor governance, corruption, and inequalities. For the past year, Sarah has also worked with the Pulte Institute for Global Development, collaborating with USAID in formulating education solutions in low- and middle-income countries. Her interests include peacebuilding, development, humanitarian support, policy, and advocacy.

# DAY 3

## TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE TOGETHER

MODERATED BY CLAIRE BYRNE

SUNDAY, MAY 22, 1PM

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Discuss the reality of climate change and realistic steps and measures young people of both cultures can take to shift the tide in our favor.



**Claire Byrne** is a politician, climate campaigner, environmental education specialist and sustainability consultant for the events industry. She is a Green Party Councillor in Dublin for the South-East Inner City. First elected in 2014, Claire's work is dedicated to influencing public policy in the areas of climate action, planning, waste, equality, arts, culture and active transport, aiming to create a climate resilient Dublin while improving the quality of life for its citizens. She is Chair of the Dublin City Climate Action Plan Committee, an active member of the Arts and Culture

SPC along with several other boards and committees. Claire is also parliamentary assistant to Eamon Ryan TD, Minister for Environment, Climate Action, Communications and Transport was the Green Party candidate for the Dublin Bay South By Election 2021. She has been an active member of the Green Party for almost 20 years, was part of the Programme for Government negotiation team for Arts and Culture in 2020 and has worked with the Party through two terms in Government. Claire is passionate about exploring the interface between creativity, politics and climate as a way to communicate both the challenges and solutions of the climate crisis and to inspire positive, meaningful behaviour change through effective public policy.



**Tiarnán Burns** is a 2nd year undergraduate student at Queen's University Belfast Studying English and Linguistics. He is a founding member of the QUB Politics Society, and its current Secretary. A Irish Language speaker and am a member of the LGBTQ+ community. As a young person, climate change remains the ultimate existential threat of this generation, and has

unsurprisingly been the driving force behind his interest in politics. Having been raised in a small, rural community, he is keenly aware of the delicate nature of the environment, and the adverse effects of industrial farming on the island of Ireland, this has led to him getting involved in a number of climate action protests in recent years.



**Jelena Collins** (she/her) is a 17 year old environmentalist from Oak Park, IL. She founded and runs Chicago's Youth Climate Coalition, helped draft climate action plans for her school and for the city of Chicago, regularly presents to community groups about climate science, and was a youth delegate at COP26 (the UN Climate Conference) in November! She also just organized an

Earth Day rally for students across Chicago to advocate for green schools.



**Marissa Kuriakos** is currently a second-year undergraduate student at Oberlin College studying Environmental Studies with a focus on Urban Sustainability. Born and raised in Oak Park, Illinois, Marissa was awarded the Posse Foundation Leadership Scholarship to attend Oberlin College. Originally undecided in her major, Marissa was struck by the dependence on single-use items and the terrible recycling infrastructure that became prevalent during the pandemic. She hopes to focus her research on closed-loop recycling systems that are consumer-accessible. At Oberlin, she is involved in the Oberlin Musical Theater Association, Asian American Alliance, and South Asian Student Association.



**Maeve Richardson** (she/her) is the Co-Chair of University College Cork's Student Green Campus Committee & Communications & Engagement Officer UCC Students' Union 2021/22.



# *Many thanks to:*

Cassie Farrelly - Penn State University

Andrea Haughian - Invest Northern Ireland

Kate Kennon - Fordham University

Beck Lee - Media Blitz

Ryan Meade - Google

Aisling Reidy - Human Rights Watch

Seán Mac Cárthaigh

Zack Dictakis - Technical Producer

Niall O'Dowd, Debbie McGoldrick, Kate Hickey & Kerry O'Shea - IrishCentral.com

## The Staff of the New York Irish Center:

Executive Director - George C. Heslin

Conference Coordinator/Director of Social Care - Ryan McNally

Conference Coordinator/Development Assistant - Hannah Ciesil

Director of Arts and Culture - Stephen Long

**We are grateful for the support of the Consul General of Ireland in New York (Dept. of Foreign Affairs Emigrant Support Program), The Northern Ireland Bureau, and our media partner: Irish Central.**



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