Clinton leads elite at secret Irish summit

Bryan Meade

Special guests: Dublin's Four Seasons hotel was guarded by marksmen and a garda plane. The only concession to the media came when former US president Bill Clinton held a press conference with Bono

Paul Colgan

THE biggest and most secretive gathering of important international figures ever seen in Dublin has been held in the capital for the benefit of 175 students.

For three days 50 world leaders, scientists, distinguished businessmen and showbusiness personalities have been corralled in the Four Seasons hotel at a glittering International Achievement Summit.

The heavily policed event was organised by the American Academy of Achievement for the group of outstanding graduate students from 40 countries in the disciplines of law, medicine, genetics, the sciences, engineering, economics, finance, journalism, international relations and diplomacy. The students were told "to conduct themselves in a manner befitting their participation as future leaders and promising achievers" — and warned not to smoke or talk to journalists.

The distinguished guests have also been busy clapping each other on the back. Last night "Golden Plate awards of recognition" were presented at a dinner to recipients including Enya, former US president Bill Clinton, Hamid Karzai, the chairman of the provisional government in Afghanistan, and Chuck Berry, the rock singer.

Catherine Reynolds, the host chairman, said yesterday it was the academy's policy "to foster a candid, off-the-record environment". She added: "We have found this policy is the most conducive to honest and open exchanges."

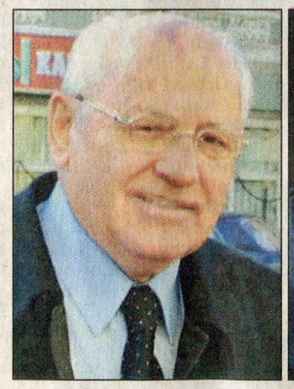
Bertie Ahern, the taoiseach, hosted the summit, which started on Thursday and ended last night. Today most delegates will board Achievement One, a chartered aircraft, at Dublin airport to fly back to

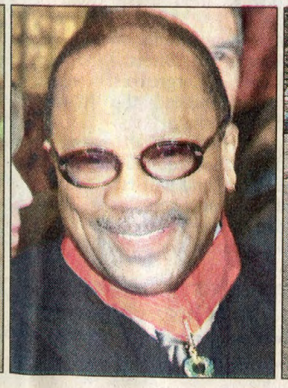
Other guests of honour in Dublin included Mikhail Gorbachev, the former Soviet president; President Andres Arango of Colombia; Tony Ryan, the chairman of Ryanair; David Trimble, the Ulster Unionist leader, and Peter Sutherland, the chairman of Goldman Sachs.

As a member of the academy's awards council, Ahern finds himself in world-beating company. Other members are Bill Gates, the Microsoft founder; Sir Edmund Hillary, one of the first two men to climb Mount Everest; former American president Jimmy Carter; Ehud Barak, the former Israeli prime minister; George Lucas, the Star Wars producer; and Edna O'Brien, the novelist.

Access to the Four Seasons hotel in Ballsbridge was limited to delegates and guests and the perimeter was protected by marksmen with air cover provided by a garda plane.

The organisers only agreed to stage a press conference featuring Clinton and Bono on Thursday following a request by Clinton. The former president held talks with John Hume, the former SDLP leader and Nobel





Famous names: security was tight for guests of honour, including Gorbachev and Henry Kissinger. Music legend Quincy Jones was due to appear

than an hour on Friday. It is thought they discussed Northern Ireland and other international conflicts. Other world leaders held talks in the wings of the conference.

The media blackout was broken again briefly last night when the taoiseach's office released Ahern's speech at the Golden Plate dinner. Quoting John F Kennedy, he said: "This is the most extraordinary collection of talent, of human knowledge, that has ever been gath-

ble exception of when Thomas Jefferson dined alone."

The conference dined in St Patrick's Hall, Dublin Castle, on Friday night. The castle had been checked by security experts both electronically and with sniffer dogs and streets were closed off forcing some nearby pubs and restaurants to shut down.

A government spokesman said: "We would have only put on security in the normal way. Clinton and other heads of

are always accorded security."

The students who attended the conference, five of them Irish, were selected by prestigious international exchange programmes and from universities around the world.

Gerard Flaherty, a doctor from Galway, had come first in his college class and won gold medals for all eight subjects in his final medical exam. Others included Oran Doyle, a graduate of Harvard Law School and Trinity College Dublin, and

student at St Patrick's College, Drumcondra.

While many students came from Africa, Europe and Australasia, Americans dominated the delegation and included many Rhodes scholars. One of the symposiums in Dublin addressed developments in the science and understanding of the brain, and stigmas associated with mental handicap.

This was the third International Achievement Summit. Previous conferences were held

don two years ago, when Ahern received a Golden Plate award.

The academy is a low-profile organisation established in 1961 to "inspire youth with new dreams of achievement in a world of boundless possibility," according to its literature. Its board of directors includes Karl Eller from Arizona, chairman of Eller Media; James Kimsey, founder of America Online; the country singer Naomi Judd and General David Jones, former chairman of