
Documentation

‘This Is an Historic Moment’ for Chile

We publish below excerpts from the Oct. 18, 2005 letter written by Michelle Bachelet Jeria as an introduction to the 2006-2010 Program of Government of the four-party Concertación coalition.

I wasn't brought up to take power, and have done nothing to seek it. I don't belong to the traditional elite. My name is not among those families who founded Chile. I went to a public school, and to the University of Chile. I studied medicine because I marvelled at the possibility of healing the sick, of



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Chilean President Michelle Bachelet was sworn into office in a jubilant atmosphere. She does not belong to the traditional elite, and has vowed to restore the social safety net of the common people, which the Hitlerian Pinochet regime so brutally eliminated.

eliminating their pain, of erasing their anguish, and bringing happiness back into the home of a sick child.

Like the majority of Chileans, nothing has been given to me. Everything I know, I have learned by fighting, for the love of my children, my profession, my country.

Politics entered my life by destroying what I loved most. Because I was a victim of hate, I have dedicated my life to loosening its grip, turning it into understanding, tolerance, and—why not say it?—love.

I have lived too close to Chile’s history not to recognize an historic opportunity when I see it. And this, without doubt, is an historic opportunity. A moment that won’t be repeated again in Chile. . . .

We know that development with justice and peace are not empty words, but goals we can achieve. This depends only on whether we work together.

Today, as never before, we feel that divisions, hate and fear belong to the past; the past embraced by those who want Chile to change, without changing themselves. Those who can’t imagine leaving their fights and egos behind for the good of the country; those who make arrogance and fear their only banner. . . .

My candidacy emerged spontaneously from the support of our citizens. It wasn’t the result of some negotiation or backroom deal, or of a party agreement. This program reflects the roots of my candidacy. Hundreds of people contributed to it, through citizen dialogues and working groups.

This is a program that was conceived, keeping in mind the needs of those Chileans whose opinions aren’t heard on the television, or reported in newspapers; those who can’t hire an expensive law firm, who don’t have relatives or influence in the government, in Congress, trade unions, or corridors of power. . . .

I have been criticized a lot because of my tendency to consult, and include people. For the elites, listening is a sign of weakness. I’m convinced, on the contrary, that it is there that the power of what we are doing can be found.

Chile’s primary wealth is not its copper, fruit, or lumber, but its people. That wealth of ingenuity, of willingness, of

dreams is what I want to empower. . . .

We need to take a giant step in social protection, with better pensions, more generous unemployment insurance, and higher standards of health care for all. . . because it is immoral that many Chileans don’t have the right to get sick or get older without falling into poverty. It is immoral that so many middle-class families live in the fear that some unforeseen event will cause them to lose what they have earned through many years of work. . . .

We need to ensure that our State offers more, and treats people better. It cannot be the case that so many Chileans feel alone and defenseless. . . .

My job is nothing other than to offer Chileans the opportunity for Chile to belong to everyone, and that we all be Chile. The key to the future isn’t in one person’s hands, but in all our hands. Among us all, we can achieve change and together see a better country. For me, it is a privilege to serve all Chileans in this new and promising Spring.

From Bachelet’s speech given March 11 in Santiago:

I know that I represent the hopes of millions of Chilean men and women, who see in me an opportunity to have a better country. . . .

I want to lead a government that connects deeply with the transformations of Chilean society. A government close to its citizens, which addresses the big issues of development, and at the same time, shows concern for the lives of its citizens. . . .

This is an historic moment. Look who is speaking to you. You elected me on Jan. 15. . . . What you have done has focussed the eyes of the world on us. . . .

I know I symbolize a coming together of Chileans. In the past we suffered too much with the pain of so many men and women. How many beloved human beings cannot be with us here tonight! But we are leaving *that* dramatically-divided Chile behind.

I said it yesterday from the balcony of La Moneda [Presidential palace—ed]. We cannot forget the pain. We cannot minimize the memory of such sacrifice. But we have learned from that suffering, because today our eyes are on the past, but also on the future. A country is emerging in which we can look at each other and recognize that we all belong to the same Chile. . . .

We don’t want individualism or indifference. . . . We want solidarity.”

From a March 12 speech in Santiago:

We are on the threshold of making this a developed country, with greater justice and opportunity. The world is watching us. . . . This little country today is preparing to take a giant step in its history, of prosperity for all its sons. . . . The time for *all* [Chileans] has arrived, in this my beloved country, a nation of, and by, its citizens. . . . Viva Chile!