



PERMANENT MISSION OF
CHILE
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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STATEMENT BY

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**GENERAL DEBATE
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UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

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Mr. President,

On behalf of the Republic of Chile, I should like to congratulate you on your election as President of the Assembly.

Eight years ago, representatives of all the countries of the planet met in this General Assembly to adopt the Millennium Declaration – a text that is one of the broadest and most explicit agreements ever drafted by the international community on the subject of development, well-being and the quality of life of people.

This Declaration, Mr. President, set a series of very precise standards as regards the fight against hunger and poverty, education, health, gender equality, environment and cooperation, stating for each of them the minimum to which nations should commit themselves.

The world announced the civilizing task to which it aspires.

Which are the inescapable challenges.

Which are the unavoidable tasks for any government and for the international community.

It defined a real ethical vision for the leaders of nations.

The world has changed since then.

We have witnessed – sometimes tragically – the emergence or reappearance of various problems of global significance, such as climate change, terrorism and the food crisis.

At the same time, the interdependence of economies and communications has become even greater over the past eight years, which undoubtedly creates many opportunities but also greater risks and iniquities.

In this changing context, we have witnessed in many countries of the world outstanding progress towards the Millennium Goals. But we have also witnessed many regrettable setbacks.

The events of the past year in the world give us much food for thought.

The optimism at the turn of the century, leading to talk of the “millennium of hope”, seems to be dissipating.

It is estimated that the increase in food prices alone has driven more than a hundred million people into extreme poverty.

In turn, financial instability is today afflicting many economies, threatening to generate a world-wide trend towards recession in which – as always – those most affected finally will be the world's poorest.

This is why it is so crucial to review our Goals.

Because we cannot remain indifferent to the deterioration of the basic well-being of millions and millions of citizens all over the world.

Those of us who share the same concept of progress, who have made freedom and social justice our watchwords, must raise our voices.

The world has managed to procure the economic, technical and scientific resources that, for the first time in its history, can ensure the well-being of all mankind.

We cannot squander this ability.

A better world is possible, but this requires determination to move forward.

And the current international economic crisis shows that it is precisely this determination that has been lacking.

The greed and irresponsibility of a few, combined with the political negligence of others, has plunged the world into a situation of great uncertainty.

What a paradox we are witnessing today! Using the bailouts of the international banking system, the scourge of hunger on the planet could easily have been eliminated.

And so now is the time to reaffirm our determination.

The international economic crisis is a blow to those who believe that nothing can be done, to those who believe that nothing should be regulated or that inequality cannot be remedied.

This is the main lesson to be learned from what happened over the past year.

For none of the current problems facing mankind and certainly none of the civilizing goals that we have set ourselves can be tackled properly if there is not a clear choice of a public course, of collective action by States and civil society.

This is why today I appeal to all to work together to support the emergency measures to deal with the food crisis and to redouble our efforts to ensure that the developing economic crisis does not prevent us from attaining the Millennium Development Goals.

This is why I appeal for an urgent and genuine commitment to multilateralism.

This is why we must undertake to continue supporting and reforming the international institutions, and particularly the United Nations, to make the Organization more representative and more democratic and a better response to the hopes of our peoples.

This is also why we must reach agreement at the Doha Round of the World Trade Organization; this is why we must achieve concrete results at the forthcoming Conference on Financing for Development; and this is why we must also ensure the success of the 2009 Copenhagen Conference on Climate Change and convert those negotiations into agreements that make a decisive contribution to development.

Mr. President,

I appear before this General Assembly as the representative of a nation that has much to contribute. Modestly and proudly, we announce to this Assembly that Chile is achieving the Millennium Goals set for 2015 ahead of time.

We can say that it is possible to eradicate poverty, that it is possible to emerge from underdevelopment and – even more importantly – that it is possible to do so in democracy and freedom.

We can say that we have given concrete embodiment to our determination to advance.

My country almost tripled the size of its economy between 1990 and 2008, which are the years of democracy in Chile. And just as we have made the economy grow, we have also made social investment and equity grow.

We have advanced strongly on all fronts: health, education, housing, quality of life, social cohesion.

The numbers speak for themselves. At the end of the dictatorship, in 1989, four out of every ten Chileans were living in poverty. That 40 per cent had dropped to 13 per cent in 2006.

And although we are fully aware of what remains to be done, we feel satisfied with what has been achieved.

Whenever we achieve one goal, we set ourselves a new horizon of challenges.

And just as we have drastically reduced poverty, today we aim to guarantee universal access for all Chilean men and women to a social welfare system that allows them to live their lives in tranquility, and removes the fear of disease, poverty or old age, thus increasing opportunities for all, so as to advance steadily in greater equality.

But I wish this morning to highlight the reasons for these achievements.

What underlies them is a clear political determination, shared by the majority.

The country has freely chosen a path of economic growth, political democracy and social justice.

All political sectors have converged on this path. With differences, of course, as in any democracy, but all are aware that these are the major goals of Chilean society.

Because behind the achievements, there has also been a sad learning process.

In the past, when the country became divided, when the country became polarized in irreconcilable factions, much suffering and very great social setbacks occurred.

Democracy placed at the centre of public life, as a goal for a more free society and as a means of achieving a more fair society, has been one of the main lessons that we Chileans have learned and that largely explains the achievements of the last 18 years.

This same conviction led us recently to come to the aid of a friendly democracy.

One week ago, when there was a threat to disrupt democratic institutional order in the Republic of Bolivia, the nations of South America offered support to the legitimately elected authorities and collaboration for the redirecting of the domestic political dialogue, together with condemnation of rebellion and bloodshed.

Over a few days, we succeeded in convening a meeting in Santiago of the Presidents of the member countries of UNASUR in order to agree with the President of Bolivia on a method for talks and to find a peaceful solution to the conflict in that country.

As the convener of this historic regional meeting, I wish from this rostrum to express appreciation for the willingness displayed by all those involved.

We have set an example of how multilateral commitment should be understood. It is a commitment forged in the diversity of political projects but based on shared values such as democracy, peace and defence of human rights.

The La Moneda Summit (this meeting is named after the Chilean Presidential Palace) will for ever symbolize the moment at which the South American nations decided to strengthen their commitment to democracy, whenever it is threatened anywhere on the continent.

What does this episode tell us?

It tells us that the values of democracy, dialogue, human rights and peace are becoming stronger than ever in Latin America.

It tells us that the region wants to leave behind the dark moments of its history.

It tells us that democracy is established as a system of government.

It tells us that violence has no place in politics.

And it tells us that these values, in addition to being widely shared by the citizens, are becoming entrenched in multilateralism, in institutions and in international law.

All the more reason, then, that we should feel obliged to cooperate in the building of a better world.

Over these years, we have learned that national policies, although essential, are not enough.

That there is no incompatibility between affirmation of one's own identity and integration.

That international agreements must be formulated to govern globalization and make democracy and the social rights of the citizens a universal requirement.

Each country has the right and the duty to contribute to the creation of a world in which the great values of mankind prevail, regardless of the country's economic or demographic dimension, of its influence or its power, or of how close it is to or how far it is from the centres where decisions are taken that affect the lives of each and every one of the planet's inhabitants.

From our position at the south of the world, Chile is cooperating.

We have enthusiastically supported – and in some cases promoted – the most diverse initiatives to ensure the development of our peoples.

A few days ago, together with the Prime Minister of Norway, we launched an important regional initiative for the attainment of Millennium Goals 4 and 5 in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Under this initiative, Chile will cooperate in the assignment and training of troops in Bolivia, Ecuador and other countries of the region.

But these will not be soldiers.

It will be a force of nurses and doctors, specializing in maternal and child health, who will spread out over the fields and mountain ranges of our America, birthing babies, helping mothers and caring for sick children.

Because despite the progress made in this regard in recent years, which has increased the percentage of attended births from 78 to 89 per cent, 22,000 mothers die each year on our continent simply because they received no professional care.

Despite the improvement in child mortality, 400,000 Latin American children under five years of age are still dying each year.

Hence the urgency of this initiative, which is the urgency of promoting democracy and the social development of our people.

Mr. President,

In just over two months, the world will have a noble reason for celebration.

It will be the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

What a great step forward for mankind!

This transcendental charter of rights marked the beginning of the end of centuries and centuries of arbitrary action, death, torture and abuse of power.

This charter of course did not represent an immediate solution.

However, it did mean the beginning of the largest and most effective social and political mobilization in favour of the dignity of persons.

Now, those who violate this charter sully their reputation with the international community.

We have gone even further, by creating an international architecture of protection and legal advancement, in which my region set a great precedent with the inter-American human rights protection system.

We hope that something similar will happen with the Millennium Declaration.

We want it to become an ethical and political requirement for all the world's rulers.

We want the citizens of every country to protest famine, poverty and unsanitary conditions.

We want all those who practise discrimination against women to be ashamed of it.

We want protection of the environment to be part of the vocabulary of every inhabitant of the planet and, of course, of the priorities of every government in the world.

We want cooperation by those who have the most to be a political as well as a moral obligation.

This is Chile's wishful but possible thinking, Mr. President, which we have come to present to this General Assembly.

Thank you.