

CHILE

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*Statement by
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*At the
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The General Assembly of the United Nations
during the 49th Session of the Commission on the Status
of Women*

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Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished Delegates.

I wish to begin by stating that Chile shares the views expressed by the representative of Jamaica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the statement that will be made by Argentina on behalf of the Rio Group.

Let me also express my appreciation and enthusiasm for the opportunity to share with you today, 10 years after the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, the progress made and the changes and challenges that emanated from that commitment which the world undertook a decade ago to guarantee greater equality of opportunity between men and women and to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, a commitment which we come here today to unreservedly reaffirm and ratify.

For Chile and the women of Chile, the Beijing Platform and commitments have served as our point of reference in a process of social, cultural and political changes unprecedented in our history, characterized by the large-scale incorporation into the workforce of thousands of women, social participation, entrepreneurship, politics and cultural development. In Chile today, the presence of women in the various sectors of national life is one of the most visible and recognized social phenomena of recent times, a cause for pride for all Chileans and a source of enormous hope for the future.

Since the restoration of democracy in 1990, the Government of Chile has placed special emphasis on creating the conditions for effectively ensuring equality of opportunities between men and women. The establishment of the National Service for Women shortly after the return to democracy was a key step towards the achievement of this goal.

During these years, the work of our democratic governments has brought about many changes in this area, including the following.

We have made significant progress towards increasing the participation of women in the labour force. More and more Chilean women are entering the labour market at an increasing rate, as a result of which the rate of participation of women in the labour force today is 37 per cent. More than 57 per cent of all new jobs created last year were held by women. The phenomenon of women leaving the home has been one of the principal factors behind the notable progress that the country has achieved in reducing poverty under its democratic governments.

Not only has this process had a quantitative component, but it has also been accompanied by the participation of women in sectors traditionally reserved for men, such as working in mines, operational duties in the police and armed forces, and senior positions in the private and public sectors. This trend has been reinforced by a series of legal reforms that prohibit discrimination in the workplace, including the recently adopted law that punishes sexual harassment in the workplace.

During the Government of President Ricardo Lagos, the country has witnessed the entry into the Air Force of its first women pilots, the appointment of its first Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defense, its first Supreme Court judges, its first women Presidents of the Chamber of Deputies, as well as the entry of women into various positions of high symbolic value. In short, we Chilean women now have greater opportunities to obtain jobs and we have also expanded the range of options into which we can project our dreams.

This is also a reflection of the early impact of a comprehensive reform of the content of primary and secondary school curricula, which has sought to eliminate sexist images and to promote a culture of equality that permits girls to realize their potential and to build a future without limitations. It is also a consequence of the steady expansion of educational coverage, which has been gradually closing the gender gap in access to this key asset for women.

A second area of public concern has to do with protection of families and of the individuals that constitute a family, in the context of a dynamic and complex reality. Chile welcomes and respects the different types of family that exist, protects their members and creates alternatives so that persons can rebuild their lives after experiences of failed relations. Thus in 1994, we adopted the first law against domestic violence, which we are currently perfecting and we have established a public policy that brought violence against women out from the shadows of the private sphere into the rejection and collective responsibility of the public sphere.

Since then, we have worked hard to reform our family law to give children born within and out of wedlock equal rights and equal protection under the law, by promoting equality of parental responsibilities, by reforming the family justice system with the recent establishment of family courts, and by guaranteeing the right of individuals to rebuild their lives with autonomy and dignity with the adoption and entry into force in 2004 of a new Law on Civil Marriage, which provides for binding divorce.

In the field of health, Chile has achieved satisfactory levels of maternal and child health **indicators** and is today implementing a programme of comprehensive reforms of the health system that will address such major health problems for women as cervical-uterine **cancer**, breast cancer and the diagnosis and treatment of HIV/AIDS. Another important **advance** in this area has been the implementation of norms for the provision of integral care for victims of sexual violence, result of a work that was coordinated among the various agencies concerned.

We **have** learnt during these past several years that in the face of inequality and discrimination against women, States cannot and should not be neutral. That is why, in the context of the modernization of the State upon which Chile has embarked over the past five years, the mainstreaming of the gender perspective into development strategies and policies is today a principal guideline for all public agencies and, to further strengthen this approach, from this year, 2005, we have introduced the first gender-sensitive budgetary decision-making mechanisms. Noteworthy in this process is the

appointment of the first Council of Ministers comprised of equal numbers of men and women.

Chilean women have also increasingly gained access to forums for decision-making, participation and representation. The current Government has considered access by women to senior positions as one of its priority tasks. Thanks to this policy, political leaders of high visibility and public credibility have emerged, which has now led to the distinct possibility that on 11 December next, a woman may be elected as the first President of the Republic in our history and that she will have, moreover, the honour of leading our country in the celebration of its 200th year as a free and sovereign nation, in September 2010.

We still face the challenge of transferring this trend towards greater participation by women to collective popularly elected bodies, such as the National Congress and the internal structures of political parties. We must bring our politics up to date with a society that has adapted to the dizzying changes that have taken place in recent years, beginning with the public sphere itself.

Chile has made significant progress along this road. Like you, we have had to face obstacles and to work out our differences. But, in the end, when the time comes to assess the results, we can take pride in a process which, although we would have preferred it to be faster, is taking us towards greater equality, freedom and justice. In this task, the Beijing Platform and the global commitment to support and strengthen it have been critically important. We must be capable of facing the new times and the new challenges by consolidating our gains and ensuring that we do not go backwards.

Projecting a forward-looking agenda from Beijing is therefore the pressing task of Member States, their gender mechanisms, their civil society organizations and their men and women.

With the strength drawn from a decade of changes, progress and successes, pending tasks and new challenges, Chile leaves with you its renewed commitment to equality and dignity for women.

Thank you very much.