



INTERVENCIÓN DE

SU EXCELENCIA
EL PRESIDENTE DE LA REPÚBLICA DE CHILE
SEÑOR SEBASTIÁN PIÑERA

CON OCASIÓN DE LA
REUNIÓN PLENARIA DE ALTO NIVEL DE LA ASAMBLEA GENERAL
DE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS

NUEVA YORK, 22 DE SEPTIEMBRE DE 2010

STATEMENT BY

HIS EXCELLENCY SEBASTIÁN PIÑERA
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CHILE

ON OCCASION OF THE DEBATE OF THE
HIGH-LEVEL PLENARY MEETING OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

NEW YORK, 22 SEPTEMBER 2010

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1. Remarks on behalf of the Rio Group

Mr. President,

In this hall, where the histories and hopes of the whole world converge, I wish to speak on behalf of the Heads of State and Government of the Latin American and Caribbean countries that make up the Rio Group, of which Chile is Pro Tempore Secretariat until 2012.

This year 2010, in which Chile and much of our continent is commemorating or preparing to commemorate 200 years of independent existence, is an excellent opportunity to sum up the progress made so far and to renew our commitment to the complete and timely fulfilment of each and every one of the Millennium Development Goals for a more human, fair, balanced and sustainable development, in the terms endorsed in 2000 here at the United Nations.

To this end, our countries are working to strengthen the Global Partnership for Development, as we pledged to do under Goal 8, and implementing various programmes and action plans to reach the other Goals.

We expect from this meeting an exchange of proposals and successful experiences for combating poverty, which today affects one out of every three Latin Americans, and for combating inequality, so that we can advance towards fairer, fraternal and inclusive societies.

Perhaps as never before, our continent has everything it needs to eradicate poverty. We have a large and fertile territory, abundant natural resources, two brother languages, ever stronger democracies, no wars or religious conflicts and – most importantly – a people with solidarity and vigour, who have shown that they are able to overcome any obstacle put in our way by nature or by Fate. I am therefore more than ever convinced that this twenty-first century will be our century, the century of Latin America and the Caribbean.

2. Remarks as President of Chile

As President of the Republic of Chile, I should like briefly to take stock of the status of each of the eight Millennium Goals.

2. Goal 2: achieve universal primary education

Chile has a system guaranteeing 12 years of compulsory education free of charge, which has enabled us to achieve practically universal primary and secondary education coverage. In addition, in the last two decades, we have achieved very notable progress as regards access to higher education. At present, seven of every ten students receiving higher education are the first generation to do so in their families. The challenge now is therefore not so much to increase coverage but to improve the quality and equity of the education given to millions of our children and young people.

2.2 Goal 3: promote gender equality and empower women

Chile is making very substantial progress in the area of gender equality. Women's participation in the labour force is already over 40 per cent and we pledge to continue to increase it during the term of office of our Government. Indeed, of the million new jobs which we hope to create in the period 2010-2014, at least 60 per cent will be for women and in the first four months of our term of office alone we have created more than 105,000 new jobs openings for women.

As regards domestic violence, we are implementing the programme Chile Protects, aimed at tackling violence in the home by using modern preventive techniques such as the electronic bracelet.

With regard to pending challenges, I would mention in particular the need to increase women's involvement in the public sphere, particularly in elected office, where Chile is lagging behind. For example, only 13.7 per cent of our members of parliament are women, which is far below the figure for the rest of Latin America (22.5 per cent).

2.3. Goal 4: reduce child mortality. Goal 5: improve maternal health. Goal 6: combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

In the area of health, Chile can boast of infant mortality and maternal health indicators that are very similar to those achieved by more developed nations. The health reform implemented over the last decade enabled us to progress towards a system of dignified, timely and guaranteed health care for a group of 66 pathologies, representing 80 per cent of all diseases covered by our health system. In addition, we are strengthening our disease prevention policies, through special programmes to promote healthier life styles and diets, decrease tobacco and alcohol consumption and encourage sports and contact with nature.

As regards HIV/AIDS, our country has already reached the target for prevalence among pregnant women set in Goal 6, meaning that no child in Chile is today infected by this disease through transmission by the mother.

In the health sector, the biggest challenge is undoubtedly the need to tackle in a timely and effective manner the effects resulting from epidemiological changes and the gradual ageing of our population.

2.4. Goal 7: ensure environmental sustainability

As regards environmental protection, we are advancing simultaneously on three fronts:

Firstly, we are implementing effective energy saving policies, enabling us to progress towards a more rational and effective use of energy in our industries, homes and public spaces.

Secondly, we are very strongly encouraging the use of non-conventional renewable energies. Although Chile was poor in the energies of the last century, which basically came from hydrocarbons, it is extremely rich in the energies of the future, the non-conventional energies such as wind, solar, geothermal, tidal and biomass energies.

Thirdly, we are reforming all our environmental institutions, creating a series of highly specialized, professional and decentralized agencies. These include: a new **Environment Ministry**, which will be responsible for formulating environmental policies and regulations; the **Environment Agency**, which will be responsible for overseeing compliance with environment regulations; an **Environmental Evaluation Service**, whose role will be to evaluate the environmental impact of investment projects; **Special Environmental Tribunals**, to hear and decide cases affecting the environment; and a **National Biodiversity and Protected Areas Service** to provide greater protection for biodiversity and the ecosystems present in our territory and our sea.

2.5. Goal 1: eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

As regards poverty reduction, although we have made very important progress, achieving a reduction from almost 40 per cent in 1990 to just over 13 per cent in 2006, in the next three years this trend was reversed, despite the very substantial increase in social spending during this period. Between 2006 and 2009, poverty in Chile increased to reach 15.1 per cent of the population, affecting over two and a half million of my compatriots.

When I became President of the Republic on 11 March, after 20 years of centre-left Governments, I promised to make a very good Government for all Chileans but with affection and special care for those who most need it: housewives, the elderly, the disabled, the abandoned middle class and the poorest.

With regard to the poorest, our goal is to eradicate extreme poverty by 2014 and lay the foundations for the elimination of poverty by the end of this decade. This is not only a moral imperative but also the best investment that we can make from a political viewpoint in order to strengthen democracy, from an economic viewpoint in order to facilitate development and from a social viewpoint in order to achieve a more fair, brotherly and peaceful society.

We are well aware that these are very bold and ambitious targets. But they are also fully attainable for this generation, the Bicentenary generation. And if these are just and possible causes, then nothing and nobody can prevent us from fulfilling them.

How shall we do this?

By tackling poverty comprehensively, using two types of instrument, in the same way as the two blades of a pair of scissors cut through paper: instruments to attack its causes and instruments to mitigate its consequences.

As for the causes of poverty, we know that they are many and varied, but there are at least three that have a particularly strong impact: lack of work, poor quality of education and weakness of the family.

Regarding the first, we intend to return to average annual growth of 6 per cent, which is double the average growth of the last four years, and to create a million new and good jobs between 2010 and 2014. So far, all the figures and projections available show unequivocally that we are well on the way to achieving this.

Regarding the quality of education, as I have just said, it is our intention to improve – in reality and where it counts, which is not in speeches and words, but in the classroom – the quality and equity of the education given to millions of our children and young people. To do this, we are modernizing the teaching profession so as to attract to it the best talents in the country and are significantly increasing public investment in our school system, in exchange for which we shall demand better learning results from heads of schools, teachers and, of course, the students themselves. We are also investing heavily in science, technology, innovation and entrepreneurship, because these will be the main engines of development in this knowledge and information society.

Thirdly, we are implementing an ambitious agenda to strengthen the family. Because many of the ills of modern life affecting our societies, such as crime, drugs, alcohol and teenage pregnancy, can be effectively tackled only if we have strong and healthy families. To this end, we

are extending the coverage and opening hours of day-care centres and kindergartens and adapting our labour legislation by incorporating modern forms of employment such as teleworking or home work, which will allow more women to work without having to neglect their roles as mothers or wives. In addition, we have launched the programmes Healthy Life and New Life, to effectively treat and provide timely rehabilitation for children and young people who fall into the clutches of crime, drugs or alcohol.

While all these actions are fundamental for combating poverty and inequality, they take time to produce effective results. We are therefore putting into effect a series of specific measures which are designed to deal with the consequences of poverty and basically seek to improve the efficiency, transparency and targeting of social spending.

The first of these is the introduction in 2011 of an **Ethical Family Income**. We know that the poverty gap in Chile – in other words, the percentage of the national income which we would have to transfer to the more than 2.5 million people living below the poverty line in order to enable them to improve their lot – is about 1 per cent of the gross national product. Through various government transfers, this Ethical Family Income will supplement the income of the poorest families and those in the vulnerable middle class, so as to give all those concerned, including women and children, a minimum enabling them to rise above the poverty line.

So as to avoid making the poorest into passive and dependent subjects of the State and to encourage the family itself to make an effort to move forward, the Ethical Family Income will be made conditional on fulfilment of basic requirements, such as children being up to date with their medical check-ups, attending school regularly and, for those of working age, working, receiving training or seeking work.

Secondly, we are submitting to the National Congress draft legislation to create a **Ministry of Social Development**. This Ministry will be responsible for coordinating all policies designed to eliminate poverty and to reduce the excessive levels of inequality existing in Chile. Its main functions will include preliminary evaluation and subsequent monitoring of all social programmes.

Thirdly, we shall **increase the frequency with which we measure poverty in Chile**, so that changes and corrections can be made in a timely manner and we do not have to wait for years to detect errors or omissions. In addition, following the recommendations of a panel of experts of all political leanings, we are **upgrading social welfare records**, which are the main instrument for targeting social policies and spending in order to avoid misuse, discrimination and error.

In the year of the Bicentenary of our independence, I wish to reiterate the commitment and determination of our Government to meet each and every one of the Millennium Development Goals. Because never before in the history of Chile and Latin America have we had everything we need to overcome poverty, achieve environmentally sustainable development, improve the coverage and quality of the education of our children and young people, promote greater gender equality, improve the quality of and access to dignified, timely and effective health care and promote solidarity and a better international balance. In other words, to create real opportunities for material and spiritual advancement for all our compatriots, such as Chile and Latin America have never known.

Thank you, Mr. President.