

Discurso en Recepción Premio Gold Insigne del Council of the Americas (en inglés)  
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I'm happy to know that there is life after the Presidency. I remember that a former president of Colombia said that the best job is being a foreign president. The only problem is that you have to be president first.

For me, the medal you have given me is a great honor. I say that personally, but also on behalf of Chile. I think that this award confirms that the work we have done at the beginning of this 21st century in Chile has been appreciated beyond our borders. Chilean people have been able to accomplish a peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy, while coming to an understanding of ways for our small country to take advantage of the benefits of a world that is becoming more and more global.

It's true that past generations of Chileans came to understand the meaning of democracy under very painful circumstances. We have to believe in our ability to coexist with one another. We have to learn to live and work in a world that is changing very fast. The global scenario is quite different from what we saw just 20 years ago, when we were in the midst of the process of reestablishing democracy in Chile. My friends, tonight as I accept this award, I would like to express to you my appreciation in a very straightforward way.

I think that in the 21st century, our moral duty is to create and establish the conditions required for growth. It is only through economic growth and sage management of the economy that we can generate jobs, while at the same time financing public policies in favor of sectors of our society that are less well-off.

As you mentioned, we are proud that the number of people living below the poverty line has decreased from 40% to 18% of the population of Chile. The amount of people living in extreme poverty has dropped from 18% to 6%. In my government, we started a special program for 225,000 families living in those conditions.

At the same time, Chile made a choice. We opened ourselves up to the world. And in so doing, we think we can compete in order to achieve growth and allow our people to prosper.

Our exports and imports represent more than 65% of our total Gross Domestic Product. If we add in services, that number goes up to 80%. In order to do this, we decided to make free trade agreements with most nations in the world.

More than a billion people have access to Chile and its goods through free trade agreements. We have free trade agreements with the United States, Canada, Mexico, most Latin American countries, the European Free Trade Association, the European Union, and just last year, an important agreement with Korea. This was the first time as Asian country made such an agreement with a country outside of Asia. At the same time, we have completed agreements like this with New Zealand and Singapore, and I think that by the end of the year we are going to have one with China.

As we open up the economy, we have to have internal social conditions within Chile of a certain type in order to compete. If you don't have that, you will have disagreements inside Chile, and we don't want that. In order to have a more free and equitable society, with opportunities for everybody, in a society that respects human rights, it's necessary to work in that direction.

Men and women in Chile are no different from those in other countries. They expect real solutions to problems such as employment, healthcare, education, housing, social security for retirement and other things. They expect certain guarantees in terms of social welfare, by means of an efficient and competent social protection system. Reaching this goal of development is up to us. It is a difficult process. But let me tell you, the kind of conditions that we are going to have to face is also important. Let me be clear: fostering growth and development is a domestic task. Nobody will do that for us. But international conditions can help very poor countries through aid, assuming of course that the aid is accountable. For emerging countries, it is not aid, but rather trade that is most important. But trade for emerging countries needs to have some fair rules. Sometimes, the rules we have for international trade are not always very fair.

If globalization has been the key word in today's global scenario, then September 2001 was a key date for terrorism. On September 11, 2001, all of us were, to some extent, New Yorkers. The world understood that there were new, different challenges ahead. I think that fighting terrorism is a tremendous challenge for all people in this room. While we promote growth and democratic enlargement in our own region, we must also be able to guarantee citizens' rights in a world that is increasingly more integrated and demanding. Terrorism must be fought through a common effort. After the United States was in World War I, it was able to come up with the 14 Points of President Wilson, and the League of Nations. Later on, after World War II, after the defeat of Nazism and totalitarian regimes, you in America were able to think up the United Nations.

The question is: what kind of efforts can we make today in order to have a united front against terrorism? What tools can we use to make a difference there? I think this is a challenge for the countries of America, whether central, north or south. It is a challenge for all of us. History has determined our coexistence with the greatest power on earth. Together, the United States and Canada make up a huge area of developed countries at the northern part of the continent. And south of the Río Bravo, there are 32 countries that coexist in a very different manner. That diversity is part of the wealth of the Americas, a wealth that comes from dialogue, but also wealth that allows us space to debate major issues.

Globalization calls for a creative stance in this area. I think we should find a better way to hold discussions within the hemisphere. As I have explained to President Bush, if the United States would like to discuss something with European countries, it can go to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and other organizations. If the US wants to discuss what's going on in Asia, they have the ASEAN Pact. So why can't the Organization of American States become for Chile an organization where important regional issues can be discussed? This is why we nominated one of our own, a Chilean, Mr. Insulza, to be the Secretary-General of the OAS.

We think it is very important to discuss the real issues. What will be our position? Can we agree on what we want for the Doha Development Round in terms of trade? Is it

possible to have some common agreement about the reform of the United Nations? Is it possible to think about what we are going to do with countries like Haiti, where what happens there will affect all of us? If only we had that instrument, if we had more institutions like the one here today, if we can hold dialogues like this at the international level. I think that all of us on the continent want the kind of political system where democracy is the rule, where human rights prevail, where poverty can be defeated and trust and confidence can be reborn in our own societies. These are the advancements in governance that we have on our agenda.

This is why I think that Chile and the United States have been able to move towards a modern, more mature relationship, in which dialogue and compromise provide the foundation for a more permanent relationship. The soundness of this dialogue is the result of common principles and shared values, the recognition of diversity as part of the wealth of nations. That same diversity made American society such a rich and multicultural country.

Let me end with a very personal reflection. I came to the United States for the first time in the early 60s. I was there when John F. Kennedy took office. When I arrived at the Raleigh-Durham Airport to be a graduate student at Duke University, I saw two signs at the airport bathrooms: white men, and colored men. White women, and colored women. At that time, I learned that white men sat near the front of the bus. But when I returned to Duke University to get my final degree, black people were there. We were able to see the process of civil rights in America, and the way the US taught the world how to tackle such a tremendously difficult social issue so that democracy and human rights were established for everybody.

Since then, I have learned that this country has been able to discover that diversity is probably the major wealth that you have here. But when you have diversity, you learn at the same time to understand that it's essential to be tolerant of other values and visions. Today, as we see a sort of a clash of civilizations leading to the growth of terrorism, you have only to show what you have been able to do in this country, leading to the power that you have today, what you have accomplished here in your own society, and try to do something similar with the terrorists of the world. As Thomas Jefferson said, it is in the power of neighbor nations to contribute to ensuring happiness and prosperity. Whether we can procure peace and welfare for each other's nations will be one major objective for us today.

Thanks again for this honor and distinction that you have bestowed upon me. I feel it is a distinction that all of us have accomplished, all 15 million Chileans. It is in the spirit of Thomas Jefferson that I receive and value the award granted to me today.

Thank you very much.