

**NOTES FOR THE SPEECH BY H.E. RICARDO LAGOS,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CHILE,
AT THE BANQUET WITH
H.E. MARY McALEESE
PRESIDENT OF IRELAND**

Dublin
July 10, 2003

I would first like to express my gratitude for the welcome extended to us on this first visit by a Chilean President to the Republic of Ireland.

Ireland faces the waters of the Northern Atlantic Ocean while Chile is located on the southern limits of America, bordering the South Pacific Ocean.

This geographical distance is no longer an obstacle to relations between our countries. The new borders imposed by globalisation assign more importance to affinities, to the possibility of joint work, to complementarity, than to geographical proximity.

This is why we are here. Because we believe that in the world emerging in the early 21st. century, Ireland and Chile have a common destiny to share.

We bring with us the friendliness and affection of a people who owe their independence to a group of outstanding patriots, notable among whom is Bernardo O'Higgins, a man of Irish descent, who first governed Chile after its independence.

We bring the echoes of different seas, different climates, different natural resources, and different panoramas. But their particular quality is linked to this remote island through O'Higgins and also through the singular dialogue between two countries whose poets resonate throughout Western culture.

Ireland has experienced extraordinary growth in recent years: education, social cohesiveness and incentives for private enterprise were the underpinnings of this progression.

And these are the same changes that we are promoting in Chile.

Some have said that Chile could become the Ireland of Latin America. We are honoured by the comparison and we believe that we are on the right track to achieve that goal.

My visit to Ireland takes place less than one month after your Parliament adopted the Free Trade Agreement with Chile, in the framework of the European Union.

We appreciate the promptness with which the Irish Parliament adopted this agreement since it was one of the first countries in the EU to do so, thus joining Denmark and the United Kingdom.

We are now partners and we must work together as never before.

We offer the macroeconomic stability of Chile, the soundness of our financial system and the juridical confidence that our country can offer to foreign investors.

The fact that the European Union undertook individual negotiations with Chile is proof of the trust in our institutional reliability and of our capability to respond to potential challenges.

In this setting, we decided to open the first resident Embassy of Chile in Ireland. We trust that this Agreement will allow us to enhance exchanges between both our countries, not only in economic matters but in political and cultural matters as well.

You possess an age-old civilization, heir to the Celtic traditions and a heroic history marked by the need to maintain and cultivate your own identity.

And you also have the drive and excellent political leadership that have placed you in a promising position in the European setting.

Chile, based on the progress made in the past decade, on our network of trade agreements, on the drive of our export sector and soundness of our institutions, aspires to be a reliable partner to Ireland.

We have come to talk about proximity and about the future.

We have come to talk about joint projects.

We have come here because, in the world today, these are the best means to bring progress and prosperity to our peoples.

Madame President:

I cordially invite you to visit our country, at your convenience. We would very much like to receive you in the southern part of the world -where we have a historic debt with the Irish- and thus enhance the bonds of friendship between both our nations.

I would now like all of you to join me in a toast to President McAleese, to the Irish authorities and the people of Ireland.