



STATEMENT OF PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CHILE, H.E. MICHELLE BACHELET JERIA,
TO THE UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Geneva, March 29, 2017

H.E. the President of the Human Rights Council,

H.E. the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights,

Your Excellencies,

Friends,

I am grateful for the opportunity to be able to share with you some thoughts on Chile's commitment to human rights, which has recently taken on a new dimension due to a changing global context. This is a perfect moment to examine those changes that affect, and at times threaten, the rights which we believe to be universal and inalienable. It is also our duty to propose new solutions to the challenges posed by the current state of affairs.

My comments reflect experiences in my own country in terms of resisting the dictatorship; rebuilding institutions amidst a fractured society; shaping a nation that is able to provide all with equal access to justice; and institutionalizing solidarity with those who find themselves in vulnerable situations such as the poor, children, youth and senior citizens.

Certainly, we still have a long road ahead of us and we face growing challenges in second and third-generation human rights, but, the bottom line is that we have taken charge of the burdensome legacy of brutal human rights violations, always confident that we could rely upon the support and guidance of multilateral institutions.

In light of our experiences, we can confirm that ensuring peace and security is a central task in constructing a free and prosperous world. Human rights are the pillar that sustains the core purpose of the United Nations. Attaining peace, security and sustainable development for our societies requires that we place people, with their dignity and their rights, at the center of our policies and decision-making processes.



We know well the difficulties that exist in guaranteeing these universal commitments, so fundamental to the collective project that is the United Nations. Violations of human rights and International Humanitarian Law persist in many regions throughout the world. There have also been significant setbacks in critical areas of concern to the Council, such as equality and ending discrimination based on nationality, religion, gender, race or ethnicity. There are reports of forced disappearances, extrajudicial executions and a worrisome increase in the use of torture, which in many cases could be considered war crimes or crimes against humanity. We have also seen dramatic reversals in the area of gender equality and protecting women, girls and adolescents from violence rooted in machismo.

Conflicts, extreme poverty, corruption and the increasingly common and unexpected effects of climate change are causing a massive displacement of people in previously unseen numbers and rates, leading to dramatic socioeconomic and human rights consequences. Children and adolescents are the main victims of these tragedies, generating an alarming increase in unsatisfied basic needs with predictable social outcomes.

The paradigmatic case of Syrian refugee children cannot leave us indifferent to their plight. We watch with concern the many instances where the rights of migrants and refugees are not being respected, and even worse, as we witness the proliferation of xenophobic discourse in Europe and around the world, as if there is somehow less awareness in recent years that this type of talk has provoked widespread wars in the past.

There has also been an increase in the level of uncertainty surrounding the stable rules that the International community has been building since 1945, as well as a dangerous heightening of tensions across the globe.

Our sole response to this is to offer our unconditional support to multilateralism and the international system in the promotion and protection of human rights, which, historically, has been the only subject of global consensus since the Second World War.

In order to understand and address the challenges that affect human rights, we must focus on determining the roots of the threats that swirl around them. We have to know how to listen to the uneasiness of our citizens, resulting from their disappointment in the unfulfilled promise of development, for which they have worked so hard.



They are telling us that in their everyday lives, their places of work, their children's schools, the health of their families, the safety of their cities, their parents' pensions, and in the relationships between men and women the negative effects of unequal development remain. Precariousness and uncertainty are spreading. People are demanding new spaces for and new forms of participation because they have learned that traditional representation does not take into account the large number of factors, many times uncontrollable, that affect their lives.

Even though opening markets has led to increased incomes, many people have not benefited and are experiencing unemployment and a loss of protections. The perception that only a few benefit and many suffer is heightened and has become a source of social discontent, accompanied by the rejection of political institutions, political instability and uncertainty.

We are witnessing a growing fragmentation and lack of confidence in local governments. No country is free from corruption which corrodes governments, political parties, businesses, public and private organizations and impacts and harms our societies. We must pay close attention and react swiftly to combat this disease.

Furthermore, there is a growing mistrust in multilateral institutions. All our countries have a shared responsibility. We need to strengthen our capacity for dialogue, both regional and global, in order to reach realistic and consensual yet tough agreements. And here, perhaps, we should accept, as a global challenge, the directive defined in the 2030 for Sustainable Development: "No one left behind."

At the same time, we must put an end to discrimination and create opportunities for women. Two obligations must be met: promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls. This means eliminating everywhere, all forms of discrimination against women and girls, all forms of violence and harmful practices in both public and private arenas. This is a call for shared responsibility within the home and the family and, above all else, once and for all, to do away with a dangerously pervasive culture that sees women –and worse still, young and teenage girls—as the property of men, inferior beings that are at their disposal.

It is imperative that we eliminate gender disparities in education in order to ensure equal access at all levels of education. This is the pillar upon which we can advance toward full



and effective participation that will, in turn, lead to equal opportunities in leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

To summarize, we are facing a series of considerable tasks that we must address as soon as possible. But there is an element that holds true for each one: the only feasible response is one that is collective, coordinated and cooperative.

This is the main principle in an interconnected world. No country, regardless of how powerful it is, is immune to these problems, and they cannot be resolved by building walls, either real or metaphorical.

Those who do not understand this simple yet crucial principle will be forced to retrace the costly steps taken by humanity throughout history.

Outside of this Palace of Nations, and in the most disparate corners of the world, citizens are waiting for our creative and concrete solutions to current problems. Their demands are increasing dramatically and we have already been warned that we face being discredited if our answers are mere words and unable to produce a clear and concrete effect on the daily lives of millions of people.

Now is the time for action. Transparency and information technology make it possible to monitor whether our words are actually transformed into a new reality, one that promotes the wellbeing and dignity of our people.

The Human Rights Council not only has a moral imperative, but also a mandate to promote these ideals. Given current circumstances, we must undertake renewed efforts to enter into dialogue and reach a consensus in our work. We can make progress towards fully achieving the goal of respect for human rights, willingly and without losing respect for our differences and uniqueness.

Also, we are reminded that the 2030 Development Goals are a general framework under which we can, for the first time, work towards peace, justice, development and human rights. Thanks to these goals we have been able to reconcile two traditions which, in the international order, appear to be separate, although they actually rely upon and reinforce each other: without dignity there is no human development and without development, there are no human rights.



Human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent. But we know that resources – both time and money—are limited. How do we avoid the comparison between such high expectations and the true status of human rights in our societies?

First, we must clearly establish the imperative that there is no going back. The language of human rights is the language of politics and dialogue. But it is also the language of will and responsibility, and the language of our most vulnerable citizens.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides us, as I have already mentioned, with a valuable opportunity to take another look at respect for human rights and guaranteeing their existence. Chile firmly believes that the global response, which we hope to help shape, needs to focus on rights in order to fulfill the commitment to development. Achieving this will lead to broader rights and greater dignity for millions of people across the world.

For example, The Summit for Refugees and Migrants that took place in September 2016 was a valuable opportunity to address the dramatic phenomena of refugees and migration, especially as they pertain to the current humanitarian crisis. It is particularly noteworthy that we have successfully agreed upon a Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, which seeks a broader, more predictable and sustainable response based on the principles of solidarity, international cooperation and shared responsibility. Thus, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration that Member States will negotiate, based on the principles of solidarity and cooperation, will become an inescapable ethical imperative.

This Council has a responsibility to speak out against every instance of human rights violations, regardless of sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, or ethnicity, culture or religion; irrespective of the type of political regime in each country. The Human Rights Council has a mandate and the tools to direct these efforts.

Preventative actions are important tools available to multilateral diplomacy. The Council must strengthen its mechanisms so that it can respond to early warnings of crises in the Rule of Law and in institutions. Justice and accountability are just as important as preventative actions.

Carrying out these tasks undoubtedly means that each State must do its part.



Chile has always focused special attention on cooperation. We have led and supported a series of initiatives that promote cooperation between United Nations organs and agencies; endorse the mainstreaming of human rights and gender perspective; and recognize the contributions of local governments, national human rights institutions and civil society organizations.

In the meantime, Chile has made a commitment to head an initiative against Torture. It brings together countries from every continent for the purpose of preventing this crime from occurring and promoting ratification of international instruments related to the issue.

After having received numerous recommendations, in November 2016, we enacted a modification to the Penal Code that defines the crime of torture according to three categories: physical, psychological and sexual violence. My government is also working on efforts to present a bill that would create a National Preventative Mechanism against Torture within the National Human Rights Institute. In addition, the creation of new Penitentiary Regulations with an emphasis on human rights would signal progress for those who are presently the least protected: those who have been deprived of their freedom.

Simultaneously, we are working on policies that promote inclusion, multicultural education and fair labor. These are vital to human dignity because we believe in the principle of equality among human beings. They also constitute concrete actions for civic life, for consolidating peace, safeguarding individual freedoms and, ultimately, building more just societies.

Presently, we are also working on our first Quadrennial National Human Rights Action Plan. The Plan will consider the design and implementation of future policies to promote and protect human rights, while keeping in line with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

We do this because Chile aspires to full development, but it does so while confronting the challenges of modernity, democracy and sustainable economic growth.

We reaffirm our commitment to a global, fair and sustainable economic model that encourages economic growth in combination with inclusion and solidarity. One that quells the anxieties of human beings related to survival, daily incomes, hunger and poverty.



We have incorporated into our free trade agreements clauses that address labor, environmental and gender issues, reinforcing our commitment to sustainable and inclusive development.

Moreover, because we recognize the importance of safeguarding human rights in the workplace, Chile wholly supports the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which provide States and businesses with clear directives on protecting and respecting human rights. At the regional level, we promoted a resolution on this issue in the Organization of American States (OAS) and we are working on implementing these principles nationally via the creation of a National Action Plan.

Our commitment, which we have clearly demonstrated in a broad agenda on Integrity and Transparency in business and politics, is to strengthen dignity and trustworthiness in public administration, accountability, the fight against corruption, and fiscal solidarity mechanisms.

These are not tasks that we have chosen to pursue on a whim, but rather because we are convinced that, as leaders, we must send clear and unambiguous signals that we respect human rights, just as we claim we do, that we are moving forward on our humanitarian agenda and not moving in reverse, enclosing ourselves within new walls that will only separate us.

Alone or isolated we cannot achieve the same results that we can when we act together as a community. To obtain sustainable results we need international consensus and cooperation.

I raise my voice in support of the efficacy of the United Nations and the Human Rights Council.

I believe that in order to meet the lofty goals that we have been speaking about, it is essential that we find a way to increase the 3% of the regular budget that the United Nations currently allocates to the human rights agenda. We need more multilateralism, more cooperation, more dialogue, more consensus and more coordinated actions. Above all, we need these actions to be visible to everyone.



In my opinion it is important to preserve the essence of the Council and to prevent it from being used for alternative purposes by any one State. We are all responsible for ensuring that the international system works as it is supposed to.

One fundamental element is the principle of adherence to International Law, which includes respect for treaties and preventing the misuse of mechanisms or institutions designed to resolve differences.

Chile is a country that is open to the world and it is a determined supporter of the rights of individuals. As part of our quest to promote these rights, our country seeks to be re-elected to the Council for the 2018-2020 term. I ask all of the countries, members and observers present to give us your vote of confidence.

We are fully committed to continuing our work towards these goals, for the wellbeing of our citizens, our countries, the Council of Human Rights and the world, which we hope will be inherited by future generations. We know that this is not easy work, a task that many times can be contemptuously considered utopian, but we will not give up. Many utopias of the past have turned, with time, into some of humanity's greatest achievements.

As Pablo Neruda said upon receiving the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1971, citing Jean-Arthur Rimbaud: "Only with a burning patience can we conquer the splendid City which will give light, justice and dignity to all mankind."

Thank you