



# CHILE

## REPORTS

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International Analysis and Press Department • Communication Secretariat • La Moneda Palace

**Michelle Bachelet President of Chile**

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# A historic day

*On March 11, pediatrician Michelle Bachelet took on the Presidency of the Republic, becoming the first woman in Chile's history to hold that office.*

**“We know that in four years we will not solve every problem, and that was never part of my campaign speeches, but we are going to take a step forward, a great step forward, because this will be the government of the citizens, from the disadvantaged to the entrepreneurs.”**

**President Michelle Bachelet.  
First address to the Chilean people,  
from a balcony of  
La Moneda Palace.  
March 11, 2006**

“Yes, I promise!” With these words, in the crowded Hall of Honor of Chile’s National Congress, with emotions running high, Michelle Bachelet became the first woman in Chile’s history to rise to the Presidency of the Republic, on March 11, 2006. On the same occasion, to prolonged applause, former President Ricardo Lagos closed out his historic term of leadership, which began in the year 2000.

Another historical first was the presence in the front row of three Presidents from the Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia, the governing coalition since 1990: Eduardo Frei (1995-2000), elected earlier on the same day to the position of President of the Senate; Ricardo Lagos, the outgoing President, with polls showing 75% of popular support; and Michelle Bachelet, the new President of Chile, who symbolizes a country that has not only reconciled itself with its past, but which now reflects the cultural changes it has experienced in recent years.

The attendance of 25 Presidents and Heads of State, representatives of over 100 countries, and Chile’s highest civil, religious and military authorities underlined the significance of the ceremony placing the

## THE CABINET

**Interior** - Andrés Zaldívar  
**Foreign Affairs** - Alejandro Foxley  
**Defense** - Vivianne Blanlot  
**Finance** - Andrés Velasco  
**General Secretariat of the Presidency** - Paulina Veloso  
**General Secretariat of the Government** - Ricardo Lagos Weber  
**Economy** - Ingrid Antonijevic  
**Planning and Cooperation** - Clarisa Hardy  
**Education** - Martín Zilic  
**Justice** - Isidro Solís  
**Labor and Social Security** - Osvaldo Andrade  
**Public Works** - Eduardo Bitrán  
**Transportation and Telecommunications** - Sergio Espejo  
**Health** - María Soledad Barría  
**Housing and Urbanism** - Patricia Poblete  
**National Assets** - Rommy Schmidt  
**Agriculture** - Álvaro Rojas  
**Mining and Energy** - Karen Ponjachik  
**National Women's Service** - Laura Alborno  
**National Council of Culture and the Arts** - Paulina Urrutia

leadership of Chile in the hands of a 53-year-old woman, single mother of three children, who suffered brutal repression under the dictatorship along with her family. She takes office with the dream and the commitment to imprint a strong social seal on her administration, in order to reduce persisting inequalities in the distribution of the country's wealth.

A profound silence enveloped the Hall of Honor as the President of the Senate placed the tricolored presidential sash on Bachelet, and President Lagos did the same with the badge of Bernardo O' Higgins, the nation's symbol of power. President Bachelet acknowledged the applause with both hands crossed over her heart.

After the signing of the decree legally installing her in office, President Bachelet swore in her new Cabinet.



**The Cabinet: gender parity and political balance**  
In selecting her ministers, the new President followed the principles of gender parity; academic and professional excellence; and a mixture of fresh and well-known faces. For Bachelet, the most important factor is that the nominees view public service as a vocation, "so I hope that throughout the entire structure of the State, from the highest authorities to the last public official, they will have this spirit of service which will guide the conduct of every one of them."

The naming of Bachelet's ministerial team was widely noted by the foreign press. Writing in *The Miami Herald*, Andrés Oppenheimer observed that "what is most surprising about her election is not that she will be the first woman to lead the country," but that she "has named what will probably be the most globalized cabinet in Latin America."

### Social emphasis

"You know me. You know that I say what I think, and I do what I say." Thus President Bachelet launched her Presidency, at a massive civic festival held on the main square in Casablanca (a township located between Valparaíso and Santiago).



There she promised to fulfill the commitments taken on during the campaign, confirming that she will

## DID YOU KNOW?

- ★ A few weeks after being named Minister of Finance, Andrés Velasco received an award from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) for his research on economic issues.
- ★ The President of the National Council of Culture and the Arts, Paulina Urrutia, is an actress. One of her best-known roles has been her interpretation of the first Chilean saint, Sor Teresa de Los Andes.
- ★ Ricardo Lagos Weber, the administration's minister secretary general, or spokesman, is the eldest son of the President who passed the reins of power to Michelle Bachelet.
- ★ Nearly all of the new ministers speak English, and most have doctorates from leading universities in the United States and Europe.

promote the direct election of regional authorities and reforms providing more autonomy to townships.



In her first official address, from La Moneda Palace, the President summed up the democratic transition experienced by Chile since 1990. “In these 16 years of democracy, we have worked together to smooth the rough edges of a divided society. Today, different winds are blowing. We have been able to construct a different society,

in which we are united by the common and noble desire for a better future, an inclusive homeland in which no one feels that it is his or her destiny to be out in the cold.”

With respect to the challenges presented by those “different winds,” she asserted: “The twenty-first century confronts us with different tasks, which may have been unknown to us until now. Not only the technological revolution which is before our eyes and within our reach, but also the way in which we relate to each other. How we interact as a community and overcome individualism, indifference and despair.”

Bachelet’s term will be characterized by the civic focus she intends to give her administration. (The government) “will work with the people, with the citizens, listening to the people, being on the ground,” reported administration spokesman Ricardo Lagos.

As her first initiative, Bachelet ordered the implementation of the “36 measures in 100 days” to which she committed herself during the campaign. Since hers will be a only four-year administration, “it is necessary to work at full steam.” During her first week in office, she implemented one of the promised measures: free care in public hospitals for all persons over age 60.

### “Canta, América, Canta”

Approximately 200,000 people participated in the civic festival “Canta, América, Canta,” held on March 12 in the Paseo Bulnes (a space north of Santiago’s main avenue, the Alameda, in front of La Moneda Palace). More than 30 invited artists inspired the public to sing, dance and even shed a tear or two, as they celebrated the inauguration of Chile’s first female President until dawn.



At the end of the civic celebration, President Bachelet gave an emotional rendition of the National Anthem, accompanied by a children’s chorus.

## DID YOU KNOW?

- ★ Early in the country’s history, it was the custom for each Chilean President to pass the same presidential sash to his successor, but this tradition was broken in 1915. At the last minute, it was noticed that the sash of the short-statured outgoing President, Ramón Barros Luco, would not fit President-elect Juan Luis Sanfuentes, who stood some two meters tall, and thus a new sash was prepared for him.
- ★ The true symbol of leadership of the nation is not the presidential sash, but the so-called “*piocha*” (badge) of O’Higgins. According to the protocol for the transfer of power, the presidential sash is presented by the President of the Senate, representing the people, while the badge is handed over by the outgoing President.

### An emotional farewell

With emotional shouts of “Thank you, Mr. President!” hundreds of Chileans, who had begun gathering very early in the morning on the Plaza de la Constitución, bade farewell to President Ricardo Lagos as he departed from La Moneda Palace for the last time as President of Chile.

Similar demonstrations of affection and recognition were repeated throughout Lagos’ route toward the National Congress in Valparaíso.

Upon entering the Hall of Honor, he received a four-minute ovation from the assembled legislators, officials and foreign guests.



Former President Ricardo Lagos thanks the Chilean people for their support for his leadership.

### An atypical career

Pediatrician, daughter of General Alberto Bachelet — who died after being tortured under the dictatorship — exile, and mother of three children. Bachelet's rise to power is the culmination of a political career full of vicissitudes. In 2000 she was designated Minister of Health by former President Ricardo Lagos, who named her Minister of Defense two years later, making her the first woman to hold that post.

“Every ceremony to install a President, above all a democratically elected one like Michelle, is always a demonstration of democracy. I feel happy because I see that democracy is being consolidated in Latin America.”

Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva  
President of Brazil  
March 11, 2006



“It is an honor for us that the Chilean President will begin her first tour in Argentina.”

Nestor Kirchner  
President of Argentina  
March 11, 2006



### Challenges

During her four years in office (2006-2010), President Bachelet will be forced to confront economic inequality, deficiencies in the country's health care and educational systems, and pending issues in the areas of human and civil rights.

In response, she has defined four basic areas of government: Politics, Economics, Infrastructure and Social Protection. Some issues will require inter-ministerial coordination. For example, the Labor and Education Ministries are directly involved in half of the first 36 measures, including the most emblematic initiatives: the country's pension system reform and universal preschool education coverage.

More in general, the President has set out to establish a new social protection system, ranging from improved opportunities for work and education to safeguards against crime and insurance against the risks of illness and disability.

### A new style of governing

According to a *El Mercurio*-Opina S.A. poll – published by the country's leading newspaper on Inauguration Day – 65% of Chileans support President Bachelet's aim to introduce a new style of governing and to imbue politics with a spirit of renewal.

The naming of a Cabinet characterized by gender balance, new faces and strong professional skills, in which no one is “served the same warmed-over dish,” as she herself noted, were the first signals of this new style.



The new way of working will not only translate into “excellent communication on the level of the administration and Congress,” according to Minister Lagos, but will also lead to “participative, open and transparent” government.

At the same time, maintaining close contact with citizens is one of the maxims that Bachelet has repeated most forcefully to her team. The idea is that the authorities will remain open to listening to the demands of the people.

Transparency is another pillar of the new style. Toward this end, the President wants to eliminate the practice of speaking off the record: “We don't want rumor campaigns, stories circulating around about

what was or wasn't said." Instead, she maintained, "what is relevant is to explain things as they are being done, as well as to listen, so that we can put into practice what needs to be done. These are two methods that must be used."

Integration and inclusion of the diverse public policy visions existing in the country will be a hallmark of President Bachelet's leadership. Accordingly, in the Presidential Advisory Commission for Pension Reform, "we are not only including experts in the area of pensions, but people who know the labor and capital market, as well as sociologists," explained Mario Marcel, who will head the 15-member commission named by the President for this purpose.



**"This is a great day for the women of the world ... We are confident that we will maintain the outstanding level of relations with Chile under the new President that we enjoyed with President Lagos."**

**Condoleezza Rice  
U.S. Secretary of State  
March 11, 2006**



**"My respect and admiration to the Chilean people for their support and solidarity, and for their feelings for our peoples. I would like to wish success to the new President. It is certain that we will deepen our relations."**

**Evo Morales  
President of Bolivia  
March 11, 2006**



**"This is not a question of gender, but of ability. I believe that President Bachelet is a very capable person."**

**Alejandro Toledo  
President of Perú  
March 11, 2006**



### **PRESIDENTIAL ADVISORY COMMISSION ON PENSION REFORM**

**During the Commission's first period of operation, it will receive proposals from all interested constituencies, including businesspeople, workers, industry representatives and retirees, among others. Later, it will prepare a preliminary report offering analysis, conclusions and proposals for changes to the pension system.**

**Parallel to this, on March 23, the President joined with Finance Minister Andrés Velasco and Labor Minister Osvaldo Andrade to submit a bill readjusting lower-level pensions and establishing automatic access for senior citizens to assistential pensions.**

**\*In keeping with President Bachelet's address, in which she referred to a government without exclusions, one of the people named to the Commission is engineer Martín Costabal, former Minister of Finance under Augusto Pinochet.**

**\*During his first days in office, Minister of Finance Andrés Velasco visited the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT), becoming the first holder of that post to enter the nation's labor headquarters in 36 years. There, he met with the leaders of the country's largest union organization.**

## MICHELLE...

Her mystique, empathy and affability were able to break through Chile's traditions and those of the political parties. She didn't set out to do so, but she ended up becoming the first woman in Chile's history to occupy the Presidential chair: one more milestone to be added to her resumé, which is marked by her strength and tenacity.



Her life is the story of a girl forced to endure exile, her father's death by torture under the military government, the loss of her brother and the responsibility of raising almost by herself her three children.

One of the activities Bachelet most enjoys is singing. When the opportunity arises to intone a bolero, a Brazilian tune, a nueva trova song or an anthem from revolutionary Spain, she picks up her guitar and steals the show. "Michelle loves to sing, and she does it very beautifully for others," explains one of the friends with whom she spends the summer at Lago Caburgua.



Her swearing-in as President has not interfered with her work as a mother. From her first day in office, she announced her intention of taking her 13-year-old daughter Sofia to school "as often as possible," taking advantage of "a privileged moment to talk to her, be with her and support her."

## FACTS

A seven-month premature infant, weighing only 1,800 grams at birth, Michelle Bachelet remained in an incubator during her first month of life. "Her skin was scaly, especially in the creases, as if it had not formed properly, but later she grew into a normal and very healthy girl," relates her mother, 79-year-old archeologist Ángela Jeria.

March 12, the day after Bachelet's inauguration as President of Chile, marked the 32-year anniversary of the death of her father, General Alberto Bachelet, who succumbed to a heart attack accelerated by his torture at the hands of his military comrades.

Ese día, en una Oración Eucuménica en la Catedral Metropolitana, el cardenal arzobispo de Santiago, Francisco Javier Errázuriz, hizo una petición especial en memoria del general Bachelet.



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