

CHILE DELEGATION MAY 6-12, 2007

I. Introduction

The Women Donors Network delegation traveled to Chile, from May 6-12, 2007, with the Center for Democracy in the Americas to experience the path-breaking leadership of President Michelle Bachelet and to understand the challenges and difficulties she is encountering in fulfilling the goals of her presidency.

President Bachelet is leading Chile along an ambitious but difficult path; hers is nothing less than an effort to heal Chilean society and bring its people together, to fight for gender parity in politics and society, and to overcome old customs and habits to give her country the opportunity to move forward and conquer its future.

Her story is one of courage and hope, and every one of us drew strength and inspiration from our time together in Chile. What Michelle Bachelet is doing in Chile has implications for women in the United States and across the world, as each of us pursue the powerful claims of gender parity in our own lives and our own political spheres.

II. Lessons Learned

First, Bachelet's leadership in Chile is pathbreaking: Our trip started with Marcela Rios who said, Michelle Bachelet has allowed Chile to reinvent itself.

Central to President Bachelet's project is her commitment to Chile reinventing itself; she symbolizes looking forward, toward the future, rather than backwards to the confrontations and pain which characterized Chile's immediate past. She also offers a different way of doing politics. She brings new blood into what had been a closed political elite. She is taking steps to have gender parity not only in her Cabinet but also in federal and local positions in government. This means that Chilean society and its governance, its women, its girls, and its men, will be feeling the effects of her leadership for years to come, long after she has left office. This is all to the good.

But President Bachelet is also having a rocky time. Her political coalition, the Concertación, has its origins in 1987, when General Pinochet legalized political parties and called a plebiscite on his rule. The Concertación has won every presidential election since 1990. But with the death of Pinochet, it is having an identity crisis and having difficulty staying united.

It is against this backdrop that Bachelet's effort at renewal, the very act of bringing more women into government, has encountered astonishing resistance that she didn't anticipate. If that were not enough, there have been self-inflicted controversies over her

capacity to govern – instances of corruption, questions of competence, and problems with Santiago’s mass transit system that are hampering her efforts to move forward.

Second, Chile’s story has implications for U.S. policy: Chile is a country that ought to command the attention of U.S. policymakers: it is stable, democratic, and progressive. It is committed both to globalization and investing in its people to blunt the negative impacts of an open trading system. Chile is independent; it pursues its own path in the region, and avoids the Cold War-era style confrontations that dog the Venezuelan-U.S. relationship. Finally and importantly, with Michelle Bachelet’s leadership, Chile despite its challenges offers inspiration and hope to women everywhere.

Third, on the issue of women and gender, there are lessons that are powerful examples to us all: President Bachelet has forced forward an unprecedented awareness in Chile of gender issues in the society from salaries and composition of the workforce, to violence, to opportunities for women to be leaders in government, particularly in the judiciary and legislative branches.

These issues are more than visible, they are being discussed and there are now opportunities to communicate on them and to interact about them (to make progress) by connecting men and women in the context of their equality and common humanity. Nothing comes easily or simply, there are lots of challenges, but participants in this process who are engaging are coming to the view that Chilean society is changing and that women will play a role in making a difference. They are heartened and sustained by the belief that the sky is the limit; after all, we already have a woman president in Chile.

This lesson is not confined within Chile’s borders. Gender equality is not simply a national issue but it is a transnational or international issue because of globalization. Women in Chile and the U.S. can and should do things together, share opportunities to improve the conditions of women. That is one thing that this trip represents.

Fourth, on the related issue of women in politics: What is the right metric, the right standard, for judging the performance of a woman in office?

A little more than one year ago, women and men voting in the Chilean presidential election made it possible for Michelle Bachelet to serve as Chile’s first female president. Yet, because this is a first, the terms by which Chilean society is judging the effectiveness of her leadership is based on the traditional patterns for judging the performance of a man as president.

This calls into question, do the same definitions apply? Results matter, but so does the way we judge the personal dynamics and characteristics of leadership. Are we consistent and clear on what it means to be strong? What it means to be a leader?

There is no consensus on these issues in Chile. This has meant that for Michelle Bachelet, there are more challenges to lead the country and to communicate with the people than a man would have.

On the issue of communicating, one could argue that it is necessary to have a communication strategy that either makes her transmit her message as a man would do, or change the mentality of people to appreciate women leadership in a different way.

As Eleanor Clift wrote in her Newsweek column, President Bachelet recounted for the delegation the flack she encountered when she spoke about employing her “intuition” in the course of making decisions, as if she had taken flight from the cool, rationality we expect from our male leaders.

This narrow framework is inhibiting her ability to exercise her form of leadership as she tries to tackle national problems, such as the failures of the regional transit system in Santiago. This is the challenge: what does she do? Surrender? Stop trying to lead in her unique way? Rule like a man? A four-year term is simply not enough time to transform the nation’s mentality.

Fifth, how does Bachelet’s leadership affect the health of her political coalition, the Concertación, which in turns affects both her power and her legacy?

In essence, some critics say that she is failing the coalition, that she has not demonstrated enough strength in dealing with her problems so far. She has not be able to reign in her own party members and get the Concertación legislators behind her initiatives. She has also repeatedly changed the composition of her cabinet, reshuffling to respond to criticisms of her leadership, which has meant the loss of gender parity in her cabinet.

Others say that the Concertación, which has run the government for a generation, and which lost with his death the role of Pinochet as a motivating factor for its identity, has become inherently unstable and unruly.

With this fragile base, President Bachelet’s success will be measured by her ability to confront the challenges such as Transantiago, educational reform, pension reform.

Finally, the success of this woman President will powerfully affect the chances for other women in Chile and abroad.

Consider the paradox we are left with; when a man has problems at his job, nobody says, “now we need a woman in this position.” Bachelet’s risk is that an uncertain or less than successful performance in her brief four year term could become an excuse for not turning back to women leadership moving forward.

In the long run however there is reason for optimism. The claim for gender equality is so powerful that whatever the obstacles, we are moving in the right direction.

MEETING SUMMARIES

SUNDAY, MAY 6

Marcela Ríos of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)

- Michelle Bachelet allowed Chile to reinvent itself. She offered a new vision and way of doing politics. Additionally, the fact that she is a woman signaled that she was more interested in the common good and less corrupt.
- Bachelet has delivered on some campaign promises, including appointing political leaders who are not only women, but also young people and representation from outside of Santiago – from the provinces. For example, governors are political appointees in Chile, and of 13, Bachelet appointed 7 women. Having women at all levels of government has made an impact on the way Chile is run.
- However, Bachelet has not been entirely successful. Despite her efforts on behalf of women in government, most women still find themselves left out of the afterhours, informal networks of power. Elites have been surprisingly resistant to change. Her political coalition, the Concertación, is now in its worst crisis since it came to power in 1990. The Concertación has lost its identity since Pinochet's death. Bachelet and the Concertación are too permeable to criticism and, Bachelet in particular, may be too much of a traditional left-wing Latin American for Chile.

Fabiola Letelier (sister of Orlando Letelier, a cabinet minister under Salvador Allende who was assassinated in Dupont Circle in Washington, D.C. in 1976 by Pinochet's military junta.)

- Fabiola Letelier, a lawyer, has spent her life seeking justice for her brother, Orlando Letelier, and all other who were victims of human rights violations in Chile.
- She talked about the development of a human rights agenda, the push for justice for the victims of torture, disappearance and death during the dictatorship. She emphasized that even though there had been testimonies, recognition of "excesses" by the military and the subsequent civil governments, justice has yet to be achieved. The amnesty law that protects most perpetrators has not been formally repealed.



Project America dinner

Overview of Chile's current political, economic, social, and foreign policy issues. Guests included the following prominent Chileans:

- Enrique Correa, President, ProjectAmerica
- Mariana Aylwin, Vice-President, ProjectAmerica
- Soledad Alvear, Senator
- Carolina Toha, Congresswoman
- Denise Pascal, Congresswoman
- María Teresa Ruiz, Astronomer
- Cecilia Sepúlveda, Dean, Medical School, University of Chile
- Paula Recart, Journalist, Director of *Paula* Magazine
- Delia Del Gatto, Former Director, SENAME
- Cecilia Valdés, Program Director, ProjectAmérica



MONDAY, MAY 7

Breakfast with members of President Bachelet's cabinet

- Coordinated by SERNAM (Ministry for Women's Affairs), including: Laura Albornoz, Minister of Women's Affairs; Karen Poniachik, Minister of Mining; Paulina Urrutia, Minister of Culture. Also present were former Minister of Defense, Vivianne Blanlot, and former Minister of the Presidency, Paulina Veloso.
- The cabinet members spoke of their attempts to change Chilean society and the status of women through public policy. The two former cabinet ministers provided more personal accounts of their time in office and their dismissals.



Briefing at the U.S. Embassy

- The briefing at the US Embassy was conducted by four senior members of the embassy staff. They described relations between Chile and the United States as good. However, they indicated some frustration with the Chilean government. Chile is the fourth worst violator of intellectual property rights in the world. The embassy would like the Chilean government to exert more leadership in the region. In addition, the staffers minimized the impact of the brutality of Pinochet's dictatorship on the current Chilean society.



Lunch with Global Fund and Fondo Alquimia-sponsored project leaders

- Foro Red de Salud y Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos
- Sindicato de Trabajadoras Sexuales Angela Lina
- Red de Salud de las Mujeres Latinoamericanas y del Caribe
- Coordinadora de Feministas Jovenes
- Coordinadora de Mujeres viviendo con VIH/SIDA Belona

- Movimiento de Mujeres por San Joaquín
 - Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir
 - Anamuri (Rural & Indigenous Women's Association) Bloque
 - Lésbico Diotima (feminist group)
 - Memch Mujeres al Micrófono
 - Red Chilena Contra la Violencia Doméstica y Sexual Remos
- Many of the women we visited are on the lower end of the economic spectrum and are using grass-roots organizing to band together and to seek various rights. The groups represented included women living with HIV/AIDS, Catholics seeking the right to abortion, young feminists, women against domestic violence, a rural and indigenous women's association, a women's community radio station.
 - Most of the funding for reproductive rights work is from Europe since the US is no longer funding this work because of its abstinence only policy. Many of these groups have been funded by the Global Fund for Women and Fondo Alquimia (which organized our lunch meeting and site visits).



Site visits

CECAM www.cecachile.cl is a women's organization dedicated to give counseling and capacity building to women who work for others in their home doing different sort of activities: sewing, doing pieces of shoes, cleaning parts of machinery, etc. It is an invisible work as it is done in their homes getting a salary only for what they make, without social security or a written contract. In Chile they are called “trabajadoras a domicilio.” CECAM conducts surveys, holds workshops to teach women to organize, and encourages them to form unions. It was mentioned that there has never been a Minister of Labor (Ministro del Trabajo) in Chile.

RSMLAC www.reddesalud.org (Latin American and Caribbean Women's Health Network), is a regional network. They work in Chile promoting Women's Reproductive and Health Rights, they participate in Chile with the national network Foro Salud por los Derechos Sexuales Reproductivos.

Dinner organized by Comunidad Mujer, at home of Esperanza Cueto in Pirque, with women from politics, journalism, academia, science, education, media, and social work, including: Susana Carey, Nureya Abarca, Mercedes Ducci, Veronica Edwards Guzman, Carla Lehmann Scassi-Buffa, Bernardita Mendez, Magdalena Piñera, Maria Teresa Ruiz, Eugenia Weinstein, and Magdalena Wood.

Comunidad Mujer is an NGO run by women leaders of their respective fields that work to form networks of specialists in their diverse areas. Their mission is to facilitate the participation of women in the workforce, in dignified conditions, promoting harmonic integration among work, family life and personal life. Their objectives are: to promote and carry out actions that aim to eliminate discrimination toward women, decrease the social, cultural, legal and economic barriers for women's integration in the workforce and to provide learning opportunities for women, to promote actions that support harmony between family and work, to carry out research and distribute information about the aforementioned topics and to enter the public debate to promote the participation of women in the working world.



TUESDAY, MAY 8

Marta Lagos, Executive Director of Latinobarómetro

- Marta Lagos provided the group with a wealth of information dealing with demographics among other topics. For example, Lagos informed the group that only 37% of women are in the workforce and the job market is expanding in ways that do not favor women. She also stated that 90% of Chileans believe that domestic violence is an important issue. Lagos focused on the hypothesis that the attitude of a society towards women is the best predictor of democracy and that democracy is a condition to prosperity. She also noted that the most important value Chileans want to pass on to their children is obedience.
- Latinobarómetro is an annual study of public opinion in 18 Latin American countries. With the goal of providing a representative survey of Latin American public opinion over time, the Latinobarómetro provides annual measures of attitudes

toward democracy, civic culture, economic issues, gender issues, the environment, inequality, social capital, and trade policy.

Valparaíso is located in central Chile, 120 km (74 miles) to the northwest of the capital [Santiago](#). It is [Chile](#)'s most important seaport and an increasingly vital cultural center. Built upon dozens of steep hillsides overlooking the Pacific Ocean, Valparaíso boasts a labyrinth of streets and cobblestone alleyways, embodying a rich architectural and cultural legacy. Valparaíso is protected as a [UNESCO World Heritage Site](#) and is often considered to be one of [Latin America](#)'s most intriguing urban areas.

Mayor of Valparaíso

- The mayor of Valparaiso, Aldo Cornejo, made a power point presentation about the various initiatives in Valparaiso. Afterwards, he gave the group his seemingly honest impressions about the machista nature of Chilean society and that President Bachelet's problems stem, in part, from the fact that her style may not be authoritarian enough.



Dinner with Maria Antonieta Saa and other Congresswomen

- The group met for dinner with three Congresswomen who spanned the political spectrum, from right to left. Each gave her perspective on Chilean politics, women in leadership roles, including the President, and some of their personal histories under Pinochet's rule. They were: Denise Pascal (Socialist party), Maria Antonieta Saa (Partido por la Democracia, PPD) María Angélica Christi, Unión Democrática Independiente (UDI).

WEDNESDAY, MAY 9



Casablanca

- We met Mayor Manuel Jesús Vera Delgado, his wife, Dr. Luciana Concha López, and a group of women from Casablanca, from the political field, leaders of a women's seasonal workers union in Casablanca, and representatives from the small business sector. After a performance of traditional dances by children of Casablanca, we had coffee and heard from the women, each of whom was involved in bettering the community. The Mayor read us the remarks made by President Clinton when he visited in the late '90's.

Isla Negra

- Isla Negra was one of [Pablo Neruda](#)'s three houses in [Chile](#). It was his favorite house and where he and his third wife, [Matilde Urrutia](#) spent the majority of their time in Chile. Neruda, a lover of the sea and all things maritime, built the home to resemble a ship with low ceilings, creaking wood floors, and narrow passageways. A passionate collector, every room has a different collection of bottles, ship [figureheads](#), maps, ships in bottles, and an impressive array of shells, which are located in their own "Under the Sea" room. He and his wife [Matilde Urrutia](#) are buried here.

President Michelle Bachelet in the Salon Azul, La Moneda. Clarissa Hardy, Minister of Planning, and Maria Eugenia Hirmas were also present.



Do you want to speak frankly?

You have spoken to my ministers, so you know about things from a programmatic point of view. Maybe you would like to talk about the difficulties of being a woman in a man's world. There are male "codes" – and even women follow them. I would like to talk frankly about that.

So, would you like to talk about the women in leadership part or the government program part?

Delegation: The leadership part.

MB: Too bad, the other is more positive!

I worked with (former Pres.) Lagos – he put 5 women in non-traditionally female areas. Then I followed that by saying, why don't we try to advance to parity? Let's show that women are as capable as men. I named 10 and 10 to my cabinet.

It was a successful, important decision, first from a symbolic point of view. Women came and told me that it opens the window for women and girls. One woman said to me, "Now I can die."

In my State of the Nation address, I spoke too much about women, according to the press. Of course I spoke about lots of other things. Parity in all parts of government, but the way it works is that the parties have to identify and find them, and they didn't do that very well.

In the beginning, the press criticized the idea of parity. In some ministries, I didn't put the right woman. Now I am criticized for not putting women in place of (fired) women. But I named more women in regional posts, so it balances out – governors, etc.

It is complicated. The kind of leadership you want to develop – it isn't the Margaret Thatcher model. If I ask, "please", does that mean I am weak?

- President Bachelet spoke of the importance of equal opportunity from the beginning of life, regardless of age, region, urban or rural, or level of education. She also responded to several questions from our group, including one about environmental issues.

PARTICIPA Dinner, with women leaders of Chilean non-governmental organizations, organized by Andrea Sanhueza, with the help of Valeria Budinich.

THURSDAY, MAY 10

Breakfast with environmentalists, organized by Juan Carlos Urquidi Fell, with Sara Larraín and Maia Seeger, a prominent expert on corporate social responsibility matters.

- Sara Larraín gave an overview of the tensions between government, corporations and environmental problems that are not being addressed. She pointed out two mining and hydroelectric projects as the main sources of environmental problems.
- Juan Carlos explained how there is no legal framework for communities and individuals to take legal action against the projects that entail environmental degradation and the destruction of community lands and peoples. The last word and power of approval rests with the President!



Academics and students at the University UNIACC, organized and hosted by Patricia Politzer, Dean of Humanities and Communications.

- UNIACC is a relatively small university dedicated to arts, communications and technology. The dean described her various programs, including a special program for victims of human rights abuses during Pinochet's rule. About 1,000 students participate in this program. She indicated that 70% of the students are first generation university students and that she believes that access to education is

fundamental to participation in the labor market. A number of her students gave us emotional presentations about themselves and their work.

- Panelists: Grettys Bravo, Teacher and Academic Coordinator, *Women and Education*; Andrea Josch, Photographer, Director of the Visual Arts School, *Women in Arts as a way of Communication*; María José Mangel, Vice-Chancellor of Academic Development, *Communication and Education for Business Purposes*; Daniela Meza, Journalism Freshmen, *The impact and effect of being first generation attending university* (nowadays 70% of students attending university are first generation at this educational level); and an adult student, *University as an amend* (Experience of going back to university after being a victim of human rights violations)

Pomaire

- Pomaire is a small dusty village about 60km west of Santiago. Pomaire's shops are overflowing with ceramic pottery in the form of vases, plates, pots and almost anything you can imagine at very reasonable prices. It's hard to sit down to a meal in a home anywhere in Chile or even in its restaurants without being served something in a Pomaire pot. They're tough as nails, distribute heat wonderfully and clean up more easily than glass.
- The proud women of Pomaire have created a grass roots organization to combat problems they see in their community. At their community center, the president of the organization of women potters (alfareras) of Pomaire detailed the organization's activities in the community. Standing in front of a wall full of pictures of visitors, among them President Bachelet, she introduced the board's members, all of whom were present. They had a lively and colorful power point presentation that gave a visual picture of the activities she had related.
- Two members of Comunidad Mujer, Susana Carey and Isabel Urzua, were present and had a longstanding association with this organization. Comunidad Mujer had given its annual prize for 2006 to the organization of women potters of Pomaire. After a brief visit to the nativity scene they installed, we visited a few of their homes where they make the pottery that is sold in the town.



Adriana Delpiano, City Superintendent, sociologist and ex-minister of SERNAM.

- She discussed "Chile Grows With You", a program designed for women from the time of pregnancy on. The program now covers 80% of the kids in preschool.
- Other points discussed:
 - Every corporation of 20 women has to have a daycare
 - Importance of women in the labor force
 - Labor is a right, but it is hard to make enough income unless both parents are working; more women are entering the labor force but they are not yet paid the same wages for the same work as men.
 - Government needs to protect those who do seasonal work

Villa Grimaldi

- In 1973, the owner of this estate was forced to turn Villa Grimaldi over to the DINA (Director of Military Intelligence). DINA turned the facilities into a detention, torture, and extermination center later that year. About 5,000 detainees were brought to Villa Grimaldi, with at least 500 being “disappeared,” or murdered by the army. President Bachelet was a prisoner here. Villa Grimaldi remained in operation until mid-1978.

Alberto van Klaveren, Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs

- Mr. van Klaveren described Chile’s relationship with the U.S. as “mature” at this point, meaning that Chile has been able to be consistent, clear about differences, not making differences public and avoiding rhetoric.
- He indicated that one of the paradoxes of Latin America is that it is easier for Chile to establish relationships with major powers than with Chile’s neighbors.
- He also said there is no consensus in Chile about how to deal with either Cuba or Venezuela.



José Antonio Viera Gallo, Secretary General of the Presidency

Evening of art, performance and conversation, hosted by *Revista Paula*

- Documentary *Estadio Nacional* with archival footage from the National Stadium when it was being used by the Pinochet regime to detain and torture suspected political activists.
- Javiera Parra, a very popular Chilean singer and the granddaughter of Violeta Parra, the most famous Chilean musician and artist, sang three songs, one about Violeta, accompanied by guitar and cello.



Attachments:

1. “The Dreams that Inspire my Term in Office” by Michelle Bachelet
2. “Lessons from a Woman President” by Eleanor Clift

The Dreams that Inspire my Term in Office

By Michelle Bachelet Jeria, President of Chile

El Mercurio, April 22, 2007

After the three most complex weeks of her government and just after returning from her trip to Venezuela, the President reflects on the changes that the country has had and tells Chileans the thoughts that motivate her work.

After my recent trip to Venezuela and Colombia, I observed an enormous amount of opinions, suggestions and demands about what the President should say during these encounters with other presidents. That's what happens on our democracy, at the end its left to the President. For this reason it seems to me to be an opportune time, at a year into my term of office, to share some reflections about the changes that Chile has had, those that still need to materialize and the dreams for the country that inspire my term of office. Governing Chile has always been a great challenge. Exercising the presidency today is a marvelous challenge, but at the same time it has a complexity without parallel in our history.

We are a national community that is seeking to preserve our identity but that—as never before—is part of a global community. We have grown economically in a dizzying and accelerated way, but the persistence of poverty brutally tells us that this is not sufficient to put an end to misery. Technology has permitted us to accede and surprised us with advances that we often think would only belong in the world of fiction but at the same time also have transformed into a vehicle of social exclusion.

An Historic Position

We are a product of a history of pain and of reunion (reencuentro). After the dictatorship all of the political and social sectors took on a historic course. We positioned ourselves to live in a democracy and to construct an economic and social model that seeks to combine growth, equity and international openings.

The authoritarian past showed us that Chile should be a “country for all”. We gave priority to consensus and established clear rules for co-existence. For more than 17 years, during four governments, we have firmly maintained this course.

We know that integration within a country has to go hand in hand with broadening our liberties. Our northern star is the search for a more inclusive society and a society in which everyone finds their own space. Diversity is the strength of democracy.

I visit many places, talk to many people and listen to their worries and needs; I am always impressed by their permanent desire to overcome, their desires to use all their potential to have a better present and future, for themselves and their loved ones. This is a great Chilean richness that we should take advantage of to the maximum.

But also, when I come into contact with people, they tell me that they want support, that they are seeking protection, above all when difficulties appear. Chileans don't want the

state and the government to leave them by themselves. They don't hope that those of us that are responsible for directing the destiny of this country to decide for them. This shows us that in order to respond to the demands of the citizens we must have a dialogue of the citizenry, one that is flexible and pragmatic.

Governing also requires a capacity for listening to one's counterparts, to know how to grasp differing arguments, being available to be a middle man and trying to rid oneself of prejudices. Because the complexity of the problems that we face today as a country, region and humanity don't have one single answer nor does any one single sector possess the truth.

In this world full of paradoxes we need an opening, a recognition of the value of the individual and the social, of the objective and the subjective, of the technical and the political. In other words, temptation, on one hand, of the technocracy with its laboratory models or, on the other, a populism with unviable technical solutions can gain ground and take us to a precipice that we have shown to be distant from Concertación.

The demands of the citizenry on politics

This scenario inflicts very concrete challenges on us in our daily work. Leading a country requires much more than recipes. It's based on defining very sharp priorities, in articulating will, working with perseverance, and understanding that responding to problems in a changing world requires adapting initial solutions to the real necessities of the people.

Our biggest challenge and interest is honestly collaborating with our heads and with our hearts to produce the changes that Chile needs to be a better country. This is our plan and this is our dream.

We believe that at this moment in history, when we are at the threshold of 200 years of independence, it is the precise time to double our efforts to construct a country that is more protective, more inclusive and at the same time, more competitive.

Many paths towards development have been tried. Ours is a path that is first inspired by the fact that people are at the center of all our actions. Because of this we hold dear the values that we represent as a nation: the cultivation of solidarity, the protection and support of families, and the reconstruction of a feeling of community. I am convinced that without these options to serve us as a guide, we will not have the more integrated, just and tolerant society that we are seeking.

It's because of this that since the presidential campaign we have said that the biggest challenges facing Chile today are summed up in the four pillars that our agenda for the government represent.

We need to generate equality from the cradle and for this we are proposing a plan of integral protection from birth. We want to accompany the new generations from the first moment of pregnancy until they enter school, including the pre-school education that is so important. We are proud of being able to say that the State's work on education does not stop in the first year of basic education. We are producing a change without precedent in which, as a country, we are beginning to worry about our children from the

womb. This plan will assure a larger equality of effective opportunities for new generations, for our children, grand children and great-grand children, now that it is proven that the most important differences that are detected in infancy, young adulthood and adulthood are an important consequence of what happens during the first years of life.

I have proposed a deep education reform as a national assignment. I have seen with satisfaction that the bishops of the Catholic Church have captured the essence of our intent in their latest declaration: “We believe that the plan of law recently presented constitutes a great possibility that, in Parliament, legislators can have a dialogue with the government and with the citizenry about education, a crucial topic for the development of our society.” That is precisely what I am proposing.

We also need to worry about old age. Another of our axes is provisional reform. There are some people that, due to being myopic, believe that social security is only an economic topic. But they are wrong. Social security is destined to create dignity and quality of life. At a time when science has years to life, we need to give life to years. It seems just to me that every person has a minimum level of income for a dignified and decent old age.

In third place we want to worry about the surroundings in which Chileans live. What do we get from giving away houses if the houses aren't of a level that assures the minimum of meters and pieces and that aren't integrated into neighborhoods? This is not the solution that we want to the Chilean housing deficit, especially of the poor. We need a different answer that increases the surface area, that assures for at least two rooms, that is constructed within the concept of a neighborhood, that allows people to continue living in the same areas of the city. This is the way that we believe dignifies and integrates all sectors, especially those of scarce resources.

Finally, we have proposed that we need to make Chile a more competitive country. Globalization demands a healthy and growing economy from us. The economy should be at the service of the people and not the other way around. It is not enough that we show solid macroeconomic figures and stability in the rules of the game. We need to step beyond that. It is required that we raise our capacity for inserting ourselves and being successful. We need to develop our undertakings, to give incentive to surges and the consolidation of small and medium businesses.

Small and mid-size businesses have been and will continue being a priority of my government. In them we recognize the fundamental role that they play in generating employment for thousands of Chileans.

Proof of this commitment is that in a group with parliamentarians from the Concertación we have drafted a protocol to reinforce our “Agenda for small and mid-size businesses”. This effort will concentrate primarily in creating a “Small and mid-size business statute”, which will eliminate obstructions to the taking off of and investment in these businesses and we will strengthen the institutionalism that watches over the competency of the markets in which they participate. In that way we will improve the access to finances for

the small and mid-size businesses and we will establish transitory conditions that favor the reprogramming of the debts of these businesses with the tax revenue service.

Women, young people and participation: My government's challenge

But change does not only refer to works and reforms. I also firmly believe that we need a inflection on the form of governing. My position is risky, but I believe that we need to nourish ourselves with other outlooks that help us to respond better to our times.

On one hand, I have suggested that we should promote parity. Many people think that this merely a question of number. They are wrong. It does not merely involve an equal number of men and women in the Cabinet or in positions of responsibility. If that were the problem, it could be resolved in a rather simple way. The topic is much more complex. It involves providing opportunities in key positions, in involves giving a signal from the State, it involves showing that regardless of gender, people should be evaluated and compensated for their capacity and not for other elements. It can't be that your daughter or my daughter, because they are women, don't have a job or earn less than a man.

I have also proposed incorporating the new generations. I do not believe that the plan of the Concertación and, in general, the governing of our country, can be sustained with only the people that began this process more than two decades ago. But I don't want to be misunderstood. I am not saying that a person should be elected purely based on how young they are. My position is to balance experience with new faces. The challenge is to give confidence to young professionals with formation. I don't want people to say that the new generations can't make a significant contribution because they don't have experience. If we don't give them the opportunity, how can they have that experience? I think that it is stingy to govern always with the same people. I know that that means that there is a larger possibility for some errors but I am sure that Chile equally needs new generations to bring fresh ideas to politics and to the public in general. We need to prepare those that will be in charge of the country in the next few generations.

Finally, it seems essential to promote a way to make politics more participatory. It seems that many do not understand the sense of generating consultant groups, commissions and other instances that bring together the collective feeling of diverse sectors. Today governing requires returning spaces for suggestions and decision-making power to the people. If many have become disaffected or react with anger at politics it is not because they are not interested in the topics that are affecting us all as a community. The challenge is to raise the quality of politics with a higher level of involvement and, above all, including the feeling of many sectors that do not feel represented.

In summary, our plan assigns a protagonist role to the citizenry as a decisive actor. We are constructing a society in which the citizenry should have full consciousness of its rights and also of its tasks through the free expression of ideas, from active participation and from a demand for a solution to its problems.

Our legacy and the country's dream

The Concertación has been what has generated a political plan that it spread with an instrumental zeal in order to recuperate democracy in our country, but shortly after beginning it was transformed into a bigger proposal that not only suggested, but rather made a palpable reality, the idea that democracy and social justice can co-exist with economic growth; that progressivism means liberty and social and individual rights; that secular and Christian humanism have a converging and not diverging path, which some wrongly believe.

What we have constructed up until now is and will be only Chile's. We are not aiming to export our experience to anyone. During all of our democratic history, Chile has maintained, as a permanent principle, the rejection of all type of external interventions, hegemonies and guardianships. Every country has a right to carve out its own destiny free of pressures. And I have made the firm decision to maintain this belief.

It is the State, and not another sector, that can best represent those that are discriminated against. With the same force we maintain that the private sector is a key actor in the development of a country. And that's what we have demonstrated.

In Chile we run an open economy, in which the public sector is a guarantor and the market is a relevant motor but at the same time imperfect. We don't want a market society but rather an economy at the service of people that are equal in dignity and rights. Our plan is not developing in the history emptiness. This government that is in charge is the proud inheritor of a legacy of three previous presidents of the Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia, without a doubt, the most successful coalition in the history of Chile and one of the most respected in the region and the world.

But our development as a country is impossible in isolation. We believe in the integration of Latin America and in the collaboration and cooperation among our people. Only in this way will we be able to predominate as people, above the influence and power of money, the threat of force and the use of pressure. We should rethink Latin Americanism in the new global scenario. More than closing ourselves in, we should team up to conserve our identity.

We that have headed the social and political majority of Chile see in progressivism our direction and in humanism—secular and Christian—our roots.

I feel proud for what we have been able to construct up to this point and I feel honored for the respect that is felt toward our country in all parts of the world. As they see us, that's how I want each Chilean to see us. This is the pride that I would like to see reflected in all my fellow countrymen and women.

I aspire that at the end of my term in office, on the threshold of 200 years of history of an independent Chile, we will have responded to these challenges and taken the steps that our country needs to advance its development.

Clift: Lessons From a Woman President

Chile's first woman president is getting mixed reviews as she tries to impose gender parity on her government. A tale of instinct, dialogue and the Santiago bus service.

By Eleanor Clift

Newsweek

Updated: 2:04 p.m. ET May 11, 2007

May 11, 2007 - When Michelle Bachelet was elected as president of Chile last year, the first woman to hold the position, people gave her books about Margaret Thatcher, the former British prime minister known as the Iron Lady. Except for the lightened hair, which Thatcher recommends for women of a certain age in politics, the two have little in common. "That's not my sort of leadership as a person or a president," Bachelet told a delegation of U.S. women here in Santiago on Wednesday.

Thatcher was stern and steely. Bachelet's style, by contrast, is all about dialogue and engagement. It got her elected in a country accustomed to more authoritarian male leadership. But it's getting mixed reviews as she attempts to impose gender parity on the government, bring in new people and move out some of the old guard. A member of the Socialist Party, she got elected despite resistance from her own governing coalition of four center-left parties, and criticism of her leadership is coming principally from what one cabinet minister calls "the enemy within."

I have written a lot about women and leadership, and so I welcomed the opportunity to travel to Chile with the Women Donors Network, a group of activist progressive women who are involved in philanthropy and wanted to see how Bachelet is doing. If these wealthy women have a patron saint, it would be the Chilean president. We met in a palatial setting, a long hall with wine-red carpeting and chair cushions to match. Bachelet didn't need prodding to talk about, as she put it, "the difficulties and challenges of being a woman in a man's world." She told how the press "destroyed" her for saying she relied on her intuition in making decisions, a comment that played into the stereotype of the overly emotional woman who doesn't make decisions coolly and rationally.

Her poll ratings have tumbled to 43 percent from 62 percent when she took office a little more than a year ago, and her capacity to lead is being questioned. There have been a series of crises to which she has not responded forcefully enough. Possibly the most damaging involves the bus system in Santiago. Bachelet implemented a plan devised by her predecessor to bring the buses under government regulation so the poor coming from outlying areas could pay one price instead of multiple fares for transfers. New buses that pollute less were purchased, and the routes were redrawn and coordinated. The result was one big mess. People wait in long lines for hours for buses, extending an already long work day, and the subway system is so overcrowded that women are asking for separate cars because they're getting groped.

Bachelet won the hearts of the workers in a country where the gap between the rich and the poor is one of the most pronounced in Latin America. These are her people who are suffering, and she doesn't pretend it is anything but terrible. She said publicly that it was her intuition that the plan wasn't ready and that she had acted on bad advice, a statement that was true but that made her appear indecisive. In her comments to us, it was clear this really bothers her. She is a doctor, a pediatrician, and she says intuition or instinct is not a hormonal response. It's a quick response of the brain that alerts you to possible danger. She cited a study that shows people who pay attention to their instinct make better decisions 70 percent of the time. "I should have heard my instincts," she said.

Bachelet is no political novice. She was Chile's first woman health minister and the country's first female defense secretary. As the civilian head of the military, she made a point of defying conventional male rule, greeting officers with a kiss so often that when she didn't kiss them, they worried she was mad at them. She was elected as a leader for change, but once she disrupted the entrenched power elites, it should be no surprise that she had little margin for error. When she took office early last year, she immediately instituted gender parity, naming 10 women and 10 men to her cabinet. Since then, in what is characterized as a "political truce," she has reshuffled her cabinet three times, firing two women, including her female defense minister, and replacing them with men who had been in power before.

The fired defense minister, Vivian Blanlot, told us she's still not sure why she was asked to leave. She attributed much of the criticism to "Pinotchismo," which is rampant in Chile's conservative media. One opinion columnist speculated she was at an age when hormones become a factor. In the end, it came down to political expediency. "It was much easier to change her than men with all the political connections," says Marcela Rios, a sociologist with the Latin American Faculty for Social Sciences.

Bachelet has brought the poor out of the shadows and named a minister for the environment, yet the path to progressive reform remains steep. Women worry that if she fails, her presidency will be seen as an historical accident and women's leadership will be discredited. After Ségolène Royal lost this month's presidential election in France, Bachelet jokingly told a group of male Chilean lawmakers, "Knowing a woman president is not a trend, I bet you slept better last night." Bachelet is limited to a single four-year term. She still has time to rebound, but given her shaky start, she'd better move fast.