SPEECH BY
HIS EXCELLENCY PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC, PATRICIO AYLWIN AZÓCAR UPON ASSUMING PRESIDENCY

This is Chile, the Chile we yearn for, the Chile for which many, throughout history, have given their lives. The free, fair and democratic Chile. The Nation of siblings.

We gather this evening with hope and joy. With hope, because we finally begin, with a fraternal spirit and yearning for freedom and justice, a new period in national life. With joy, because - for the first time in twenty years - we start a path that has been consciously and voluntarily chosen by ourselves; it has not been enforced but it is the free and sovereign decision of the People of Chile.

Today, we celebrate a new dawn.

More than commemorate the triumph formally materialized yesterday in the power transfer before the Plenary Congress, we solemnize in this beautiful gathering our strong will to forge national unity, for reconciliation paths between all Chileans, on the foundations of mutual respect, the unrestricted rule of truth, the validity of law and the constant search for justice.

The presence of our guests, leaders and representatives of partner nations heightens this celebration. They accompany us now, in this happy moment, just how they accompanied us with their solidarity in times of persecution and pain, in the generous refuge they provided to Chilean exiles, in the defence of Human Rights of so many compatriots and in the fight of Chilean People to recover their democracy. In the name of this people, we now tell them:

Thank you, thank you very much. And we tell them something else: you can rest assured that the reunion of Chile with democracy will also mean our active incorporation in all corresponding instances of international cooperation to contribute with our input to the development of peoples, to the achievement of justice and peace between all nations and the full rule of Human Rights in every corner of the Earth.

Millions of Chileans are accompanying us too in this celebration, that from one or another edge of the national territory, or in the yearning of the Homeland from their place of residence, voluntary or forced, in another land, have their hope set in the recovery of our democracy. To all of them, we send a fraternal greeting.

From this site, that in sad days of blind and hateful predominance of force over reason was for many compatriots a site of imprisonment and torture, we tell every Chilean and to the world looking at us: Never again! Never again abuses to human dignity! Never again fratricidal hatred! Never again violence between siblings!

From here, where His Holiness Juan Pablo II told Chilean youth that values of the spirit -such as Jairus' daughter- were not dead but asleep, we proclaim before the face of the universe that the civic and democratic traditional spirit of Chilean people, that gained us prestige between the nations and was just cause of national pride, never died; it could fall asleep, but after years of suffering, sorrows, struggles and setbacks, has awakened with an alert spirit to not fall asleep anymore.

Today, we assume the commitment of rebuilding our democracy with loyalty to the values that were inherited by the fathers of the Homeland and that shape what Cardinal Silva Henríquez -that righteous man and great friend of the people, to whom we owe so much- has beautifully described as "The soul of Chile": the love for freedom and the rejection of every form of oppression, the primacy of right over arbitrariness, the primacy of faith over every form of idolatry, the tolerance of divergent opinions and the tendency of not maximize conflicts, but try to solve them with consensual solutions.

These values will prevail again among us!

The task we have in front of us is beautiful and multiple: re-establish a climate of respect and trust in the coexistence between all Chileans, whatever their beliefs, ideas, activities or social condition are, whether they are civilians or soldiers, yes, folks, yes, compatriots, civilians or soldiers: Chile is only one! The blame of individuals cannot jeopardize everyone! We need to be able to rebuild the unity of the Chilean family!

Be they workers or businesspeople, labourers or intellectuals; let us channels of democratic participation so everyone collaborate in achieving the common good; shorten acute inequalities that divide us and, especially, raise to decent and humane levels the life condition of the poorest segments; care for the health of our compatriots, accomplish equitable relations between all actors of the economic process, open the access for our youth to knowledge and opportunities for work and progress relevant to the times we live; promote the participation and dignification of women in Chilean society; give our elderly the respect they deserve; promote the growth and secure stability of our economy; improve our terms of trade of our foreign trade; defend the environment and the adequate conservation of our natural renewable resources; contribute with our best inputs to the democratization, development and integration of Latin America and to the consolidation of world peace; implement, in short, the policies designed in the government program that Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia[1] presented to the country.

But just like our task is large and beautiful and demands our greater commitment and enthusiasm, we must have a clear consciousness of its difficulties in addressing it.

There will be difficulties caused by the obstacles and restraints that the past regime left in our path; there will be some derived from the very nature of things, and there will be some -no less important- originated in ourselves.

[1] In English, Coalition of Parties for Democracy.

No one ignores that the past government intended to eternalize itself in power. History teaches that such attempts can never prevail over the right of peoples to govern themselves. This is happening before our eyes in varied parts of the world. This is what we too are proving here with the event itself we are celebrating. But our satisfaction on this day cannot stop us from clearly noticing the numerous limitations, obstacles and constraints that the regime dominant until yesterday, in its quest to persist, left us.

Those who exercised total power were determined until the last day to reduce the power of the new democratic authorities. Those who made use of state assets as absolute owners, unimpeded, managed to drain as much as they could of those assets from the administration that constitutionally corresponds to the President of the Republic.

Many wonder why we accept these things and do not hide their revulsion at the courteous ways this process of transfer of government has been done while these events were committed.

Taking part in the moral condemnation this behaviour deserves -condemnation which, I am sure, history will agree with- I invite my compatriots to see the other side of the matter. We are pleased about the peaceful way without major traumas in which the transition to a democratic government has operated. Should we, to avoid those constraints, have exposed our people to the risk of new violence, suffering and loss of life? Us, Chilean democrats, have chosen, to transit to democracy, the path of defeating authoritarianism at its own game. It is what we have done, with the benefits and costs that it entails.

I sincerely believe the path we chose was the best among the possible ones. Politeness costs nothing. I am convinced that most of the obstacles with which it has been pretended to leave us tied up will not withstand the weight of reason and law. I trust that the National Congress, above the differences of parties, will approve the necessary reforms to ensure the normal and expeditious functioning of our resurgent democracy. I am certain that if someone would come to harbour the temptation of using the force against the will of the people, our Armed and Order Forces will not avert from their institutional duties.

We will also have to overcome difficulties inherent in the nature of things.

Our program is vast; the requirements are multiple. There are a lot of long delayed needs that await to be satisfied. We will not be able to do everything simultaneously. We must establish priorities. What is fair is to begin with the poorest. There are so many people with problems. We will give top priority to those who are most in need.

Our country belongs to the developing world. Our per capita national income is low; if we distributed it equally between the 12 million Chileans, no one would be satisfied, and we would stop the growth.

To overcome poverty, we need to grow, and this demands us stimulating saving and investment, the creative initiative, spirit of enterprise. Government policies will have to conciliate the legitimate requirements in the fulfilment of fundamental needs, with a social justice spirit, with the unavoidable demands of growth.

Everything in life demands time. How many years took us to restore our democracy? The fact that now we have a government of the people doesn't mean that problems are going to be solved miraculously; it means that, immediately, as of right now, we are going to get to work to solve them and, for that, we count on everyone's effort and participation. Only then we will consolidate our democracy and solve the problems.

We will still have other difficulties: those that derive from ourselves. I would call them "the big temptations": the temptation of absorbing ourselves in the settling of past scores, the temptation of starting all over again, and the temptation of power.

It is legitimate and fair that after such a long period of absolute and mysterious power, in which so many people have suffered so much and where public affairs were inaccessible secrets for the people, they want to know the truth of what happened.

We have said -and today we solemnly reaffirm- that the moral conscience of the Nation demands the clarification of the truth about the disappearances of people, the horrifying crimes and other serious human rights violations that occurred during the dictatorship. We have also said -and today I repeat it- that we must address this delicate matter conciliating the virtue of justice with the virtue of prudence and that, with the materialized personal responsibilities that correspond, the time of forgiveness will come.

There are also other unfair situations that deserve remedy or demand prompt correction. Today, I have signed pardon decrees to set free numerous political prisoners; in the next days, we will settle other cases, and I have sent to the National Congress the pertinent bills so that, in the shortest period, justice is served for all political prisoners.

It also will be necessary to clarify important subjects, never well explained, that compromise State property and national interest.

In this necessary exercise of justice, we must avoid the risks of wanting to revive other times, of reediting past complaints and of immersing ourselves indefinitely in inquiries, recriminations and witch hunts that divert us from our duties with the future. I consider my duty to avoid that time slip through our fingers by looking at the past.

Spiritual health of Chile demands us to find ways to fulfil within a reasonable period these moral cleansing task, so that sooner than later the moment arrives when, reconciled, we all look with trust to the future and bring together our efforts in the duty that the Homeland demands.

In our endeavour, we must also avoid the temptation of wanting to redo everything, of starting all over again, as if nothing of what exists deserves to be preserved. History teaches that nations are built by the cumulative action of successive generations. Every new stage is gestated from the previous one, with its rights and wrongs.

What Chile asks for us is to preserve the good, correct the wrong and improve the regular. This is the only effective method of advancing in the noble and fair desire of bringing reality closer to the ideal.

We must also care from the temptations proper to power, whether we think we are owners of it instead of mere leaders of the sovereign people and responsible before them for its performance; either turning the legitimate democratic controversy in a ruthless battle for keeping, enhancing or conquering power.

Power must be for us a mere instrument to serve. We will conserve and increase the trust of our compatriots on the measure itself that we will be able to efficiently serve the common good of the Nation.

For my part, I assume the honourable and hard responsibility that the people have entrusted me with the firm will of being the first servant of Chile and the Chileans.

What can my compatriots expect from me?

That I exercise the power that has been entrusted to me with integrity and full surrender, without pretending honours nor shying away from sacrifices, always looking for the common good according to the dictates of my conscience.

That I always tell the truth without stepping aside from the law and eagerly seeking justice.

That I always be loyal to democratic values and loyal too, within the frame of programmatic bases that constitute our commitment with the people of Chile, to whom honour me with their support.

That I respect all people and the different opinions, that I know how to listen everyone, that I always insist in encouraging understandings and reaching agreements, but that I do not hesitate in making the decisions, according to my righteous mind, required by the best interest of the country.

That I try, in short, to be to all my compatriots like a good family man who puts his utmost diligence, abnegation and authority in cultivating the wellbeing and happiness of its people, especially taking care of the children that need it the most, in this case, the poorest and the humblest.

And what do I expect from my compatriots?

I expect and call for, first of all, to understand that the tasks of building a real and solid democracy and achieving the progress and justice to which we aspire, are not only of the government,

Parliament or authorities, but instead of all Chileans; that imagination, effort, initiative, discipline and sacrifice are required from all, and that we can only accomplish them with the collaboration of everyone. Our government will not come to replace the obligations that every Chilean, every social organization, every company has; it will be there to support, stimulate and endorse them; but no one can forget that we all are Chile, and we make it together every day.

I expect and demand patriotism from everyone, to understand and accept that, above the particular interests of people, groups or sectors, the general interest of Chile comes first. If we want to achieve a fair and stable political, economic and social order, everyone must be willing to contribute generously to the extent of their possibilities.

I expect and demand everyone to abide by the ways of reason and law to promote their aspirations, refraining from resorting to violence to impose what is intended. Those who attempt in that way will not achieve it. Force is proper to dictatorships; reason and law are the weapons of democracy.

I expect from my compatriots that we respect each other in our differences, that we renounce all sorts of sectarianisms or hegemonic desires and that we make everything possible to understand each other and to find ways of agreement.

Well, I know that there are many mistreated and disadvantaged Chileans during these long years that are tired of waiting and that visualize the prompt settlement of their problems, many times distressing, on the return to democracy. I understand their urgency and I invite them to also comprehend that -as I persistently said in the election campaign- we will need time and a lot of collaboration. If you have withstood so many years of forced wait, I ask you for a bit of voluntary and rational patience.

And to the Chileans that have thrived relying on the tranquillity of an order imposed by force, I ask you to understand that in contemporary society there is no stable order nor security but on the basis of rational consensus founded on justice.

The desire for peace that prevails among us requires all our effort to keep and project into the future the climate of agreements that has characterized our transition to democracy.

In this spirit, it is highly praiseworthy the dialogue being made between workers and employers with the aim of reaching agreements in the economic and labour field. In order to support and materialize this initiative, I have instructed my Ministers of Finance, Economy and Labour so they formalize conversations between the Workers' United Centre, the Confederation for Production and Commerce, and the Government, with the purpose of arranging "a framework agreement" that would guarantee progress, justice and stability.

Compatriots:

Let us ask God to help us accomplish the task that Chile awaits from us.

Let us ask him for wisdom to make things good and not fall into errors nor clumsiness.

Let us ask him for prudence to face reality, without confusing desires with possibilities and to act with efficacy.

Let us ask him for energy to make decisions and courage so we do not get intimidated in the face of difficulties.

Let us ask him for patience to overcome misunderstandings and humility to recognize our mistakes.

Let us ask him to enlighten our minds and that he steels our will to always search, and above all, for justice.

Let us ask him for love to always show solidarity, to work all united and to help us mutually.

Chile is our home. Let's take care of it together, so its bread feeds each one of its children and that the fruits of peace and the joy of living germinate in its bosom.

I have faith. I have a lot of faith in Chile and in its people, in the exemplary self-denial, wisdom and strength of the Chilean woman, in the mettle and wit of our workers, in the creativity of our intellectuals and entrepreneurs, in the idealism of our youth, in the moral values of our families.

Our beautiful national history teaches us how this little and distant, but hardworking and enterprising people, overcoming the difficulties of its poverty and its beautiful but crazy geography, rising again from earthquakes, was capable of building an exemplary republic, admired among nations. Ideologized and divided by irreconcilable utopias, hatred prevailed a moment over solidarity and force imposed over reason. After years of bloody divisions and the predominance of violence, today we meet again, with patriotic spirit and a desire for understanding, willing to make Chile reach the dawn of a new century as a thriving and pacific nation.

In this crucial moment of our national life, I invite all and every one of my compatriots to ask themselves, looking at the bottom of their conscience, in what way each one can contribute to the great common task and that each one gets ready to assume their share of responsibility.

The world is watching us. The great figures of our history demand us for consistency. Future generations will judge our conduct.

The task is beautiful: build together the country we want, free, fair and great for all Chileans.

It is up to us, compatriots.

Santiago, March 12, 1990