Speech on the 180th Anniversary of the *Instituto Nacional*. Santiago, August 10, 1993

Truly, this has been a moving ceremony. One hundred and eighty years of life of the Nation's foremost educational establishment hold a profound significance; they are a cause for justified satisfaction not only for its students and teachers, but also for the entire Nation.

The history of the *Instituto* is identified with the history of an independent Chile, and nations forge their future by remembering and valuing their past. Countries that forget their roots, peoples who do not know how to value their history and honor their heroes—and a hero is not only one who distinguishes themselves in war but also one who distinguishes themselves in peace: the creator, the artist, the educator, the public servant, the worker, who with their effort have contributed to building this Homeland of ours—do not know how to build a solid future either.

Chile has reasons for satisfaction in its past; the remembrance of that past and the tribute deserved by those who distinguished themselves in the past serve as an incentive, a stimulus, an example for the new generations to face the tasks of the future, because the Homeland, like life, is an ongoing endeavor, a task ahead. In this task, the experience of the past helps, while looking toward the future, to take the appropriate steps to advance toward an ever better tomorrow.

The *Instituto* embodies our national calling to make education one of the pillars in building the destiny of Chile.

In 1811, Juan Egaña proposed to the newly formed Congress the creation of a "national education" to "forge free men" for the new Nation.

The *Instituto* took on that challenge, translated into three fundamental tasks: first, to form the new ruling class, capable of taking charge of the functions of the State in accordance with republican ideals; second, to incorporate what was then called "useful knowledge," that is, the practical application of natural sciences to the processes of what we now call national development; and thirdly, above all, the *Instituto* was meant to educate, which was much more than merely instructing.

Education is about forming habits; it is about suggesting ideals. Education possesses not only an intellectual content, but also an ethical and moral content. Education aims to create well-rounded men and women who face life equipped not only with a wealth of knowledge, but with principles, convictions, self-discipline, generosity, and love.

In this regard, it is worth recalling what was stated in the "ordinances" issued in 1818, establishing the tasks of the *Instituto Nacional*. According to those ordinances, "it was to form profound statesmen and upright magistrates; exact scholars to rectify harsh agriculture; eloquent jurists to foster civil harmony; chemists to analyze the wealth—which, being unknown, we tread upon in this country;

botanists to unfold the useful virtues of precious plants; well-grounded physicians to aid suffering nature; and virtuous citizens, prepared and useful in all classes of the State."
Throughout its 180 years, the *Instituto* has been consecrated to fulfilling these tasks, and it served as a guiding model, not only for its own mission, but for the extension of public education at the secondary level—of what were called "the humanities"—throughout the entire country. In the image and likeness of the *Instituto Nacional*, state-funded, free *liceos*[1] began to emerge in the capital and the provinces for the humanistic secondary education of young Chileans.

The tradition of the *Instituto Nacional* and the national *liceos* is a cause for satisfaction. It instituted an educational system characterized by the values it embodied: committed to freedom, pluralism, and democracy.

The Chilean *liceo*, with the *Instituto Nacional* at its head, made it possible, in the past century and so far in this century, for boys from all over the country who lacked the resources to afford a good education to enter secondary education and gain access to the university. And beyond that lack of resources, this system provided young Chileans of modest backgrounds with the education that allowed them to attain a higher standard of living and assume responsibilities in the leadership of our country.

I would say that the leading role that the so-called national middle class has played in Chilean life since the beginning of this century traces its cradle and was conceived in the *Instituto Nacional* and in the *liceos* throughout the country. This system has been an instrument of social mobility, has formed ruling classes from the graduates of the *liceo* and the Institute, and has allowed pluralism in coexistence and access to higher conditions and superior responsibilities to be open to humble Chileans from all sectors.

I was not fortunate enough to be a student at the *Instituto Nacional*; I am the product of a *liceo*; I was educated at the *Liceo de Hombres de San Bernardo* (San Bernardo Boys' High School) and finally at the Barros Arana National Boarding School. However, I had the honor of being a teacher at the *Instituto Nacional*, and I remember with emotion and satisfaction the years I worked in its classrooms, the camaraderie with its teachers, the satisfaction, and also the difficult moments my students gave me, among whom I have the honor of counting many of my current collaborators: my two Ministers of Education were students of mine at the *Instituto Nacional*: Ricardo Lagos and Jorge Arrate.

I do not want to let this occasion pass without paying tribute to the teachers. Not only as a student—and all of you, students, know them, know their quirks, like them or dislike them—but in some way you realize how hard they strive, how heavy their task is. I believe that one of the most complex tasks is the educational task. Dealing with classes of 30 to 40 students, from very young children to mature youths, with the problems characteristic of the crisis of adolescence, each with their own personality, and trying to understand them, trying to guide them, and gradually forming them. What a tremendous responsibility and what a difficult task! And how much patience it requires!

[1] Translator´s note: In the Chilean educational system, a *liceo* is a public secondary school, equivalent to a high school in the United States or a secondary school in the United Kingdom. Historically, these institutions have played a foundational role in Chilean public education, providing academic preparation for university and civic life.

I confess that among the tasks I have carried out in my life, none has seemed more tedious to me than grading students' exams. And I taught four hours a week, yet there are teachers who teach 40 or more hours a week, and who do not have to grade the exams of four classes—I had two classes, 80 students in total—but rather the exams of 200, 300, 400 students. The truth is that the teacher's task involves great sacrifice and is not always well understood. In the past, there was more respect for the dignity of the teacher.

In our country—I do not know if it is so everywhere in the world—the teacher has generally lived modestly. Their income has been low, sometimes abysmally so. Yet, despite that poverty, they were respected. The teacher, in the town, is a prominent figure; the teacher, to their students, is a second father; the teacher inspires respect and wins affection. The teacher of old deserves the citizens' recognition.

But over time, in this mass society where hierarchies are lost, many sectors have begun to understand the teacher as a mere servant of their students and parents, who allow themselves to presume to dictate rules to the teachers on how they should work, claiming to know more than them about how to educate. The sense of dignity of the teaching profession has been lost.

Society owes a debt to teachers. I want to point out that my Government has perfectly understood this debt and this commitment to Chilean public education and to the teaching profession. To public education, to ensure that it is accessible to all as a basic instrument to defeat poverty and drive development; also to strengthen democratic values. On the other hand, to improve its quality.

Nations today, across the world, are conditioning their future depends largely on their capacity to train their new generations in the knowledge and mastery of sciences and techniques. Countries require capable people; each day, labor becomes more skilled. Hence, rather than major educational reforms, it is necessary to gradually perfect and improve the quality of the educational system.

And that is the task that my Government has assumed, which we understand to be a Chilean task, rising above any single administration: to improve the quality of education means endowing it with greater means; it means allowing the professional development of teachers, promoting them; it means stimulating teachers to improve themselves; it means creating incentives and providing means and resources so that education becomes increasingly efficient, not only in training and the transmission of knowledge, but also in the formation of habits, the building of character, the development of self-discipline, and the inculcation of the social and moral values indispensable to form individuals useful to society, with the capacity to serve and to build a better future.

This requires dignifying the teacher, through social recognition and through their appropriate economic improvement. This is a task that requires time. Along with putting into practice the programs to improve the quality of education, first at the primary (*básico*) level, now at the secondary (*medio*) level; along with extending the programs to provide resources to establishments, to improve assistance in breakfasts, lunches, and school supplies at the primary level—which was the most neglected and the one that needed it most, in a program that tends to extend to the secondary level;

along with making the effort to gradually transform the secondary level, not only in humanistic-scientific education, but also in the technical-vocational field.

Because the *liceo* is not a mere creator of university candidates; the *liceo* must be capable of training both those who, due to their intellectual conditions and their calling, wish to go to university, and those who, due to their conditions, aptitudes, and callings, wish to enter productive work. And this means bifurcating the educational scheme to orient it in both directions.

Alongside this, we introduced the Teacher Statute (*Estatuto Docente*), a program destined to improve the treatment of Chilean teachers, to dignify the teacher, improve their income, open opportunities for professional development, recognize their seniority, and provide incentives for merit. This program has been implemented over the course of three years.

Undoubtedly, we do not definitively resolve the fate of teachers with this alone. It is evident that, as of today in Chile, the teacher is still very far from having the social and economic status to which they are entitled by virtue of their function. And this gap can also be an obstacle preventing the teaching body as a whole—and not just those who are most efficient or have the greatest calling—from fully fulfilling their leading task.

There is much to be done, but nothing is done overnight; everything takes time. And just as the Teacher Statute has meant a progressive program of improvement by stages that has taken three years, a new stage must follow. We will not fix things with threats during a pre-election period to try to resolve the baggage of the past in a few months. We are going to move forward, with creative will, with a spirit of justice, but with understanding and solidarity among all.

And just as we have advanced in these three years, we must form a new program to continue advancing in the coming years ahead. That is the way countries resolve their problems—a constructive, generous, understanding way.

I want to conclude by saying to the young students: being a student at the *Instituto Nacional* is a great responsibility; having the possibility of being educated in a school of high standing, in a school that holds the records in the Academic Aptitude Test (*Prueba de Aptitud Académica*)—as the Mayor pointed out a moment ago from this very podium—is, in a way, a privilege.

And privileges oblige; privileges mean rising to the occasion to deserve them; they demand greater effort, they demand being consistent with the ideals, with the spirit represented by an institution tied to the history of the Homeland, linked to democratic values, linked to the sense of freedom, linked to the spirit of rationality, linked to pluralism, to the capacity for tolerance and understanding, as the *Instituto Nacional* has been. That belonging imposes duties.

Life, I repeat, is a task, and everyone undertakes that task with the baggage provided by their own capacity, but also by their history, their past, their education. And you, with the baggage given to you by your time and your education at the *Instituto Nacional*, have the duty in life to face your commitment to Chile and to the construction of a better Chile, not thinking "what does Chile give me,"

but rather thinking "what will I give to Chile, what will I be capable of giving it to build that better Homeland we all yearn for."

You have the duty to live up to the commitment you assume and to be consistent with the words of your anthem: "To be illuminated by this first beacon of light of the Nation."