

**Notes for the speech of H.E. President Michelle Bachelet at the
meeting with Human Rights Watch**

New York, 25 September 2007

(VOCATIVOS)

My dear friends at Human Rights Watch:

I must say, first of all, how deeply moved I am by this invitation, and that I was honored to accept.

I would like to thank you as the representative of a people that has experienced the suffering caused when a State systematically violates human rights, and as a citizen of a country that, from very early on, played a prominent role in the creation of the United Nations' Human Rights System.

You will be aware of my own personal experience with the abuse of human rights.

Those were painful times for me, for my family, and for my country.

They were certainly the darkest chapter in Chile's history because of the unbridled force unleashed against defenseless citizens who had committed no crime; they merely thought differently at a time when that was forbidden.

Human Rights Watch has long worked to prevent such abuses. And, speaking on behalf of all those Chileans who suffered the violation of our rights, I would like to highlight the importance of the support and solidarity of civil organizations - of which Human Rights Watch is a leading example - and of their role in denouncing the violations that were taking place.

Since the creation of the Helsinki Group in the 1970s and the subsequent joining of all the Watch groups into a single organization, Human Rights Watch has been one of the non-governmental organizations that has been most active in denouncing abuses and defending and promoting human rights around the world.

Your contribution, along with that of other civil organizations, has been decisive in the creation of the UN Human Rights System.

Steadily but surely, respect for human rights has become a language common to all humanity, and one that no government can ignore.

Along with democracy, respect for human rights has become a universally-accepted standard.

And we are ever more aware of the way in which human rights permeate all spheres of social co-existence.

The fact that Human Rights Watch not only has regional divisions, but also addresses global issues, such as the trafficking of arms, children's rights and those of women, is a clear sign of how the language of human rights is developing into the great ethical and moral code of humanity in this twenty-first century.

The road has not been easy by any means. In many parts of the world, at different times, we have seen how people's rights have been trampled on for reasons - if that is the right word - of ideology, nationality, color, sex or, simply, because they happened to be different.

But we are striving to create a world in which such abuses are no longer possible.

Nunca más, never again, as we said in Chile after our experience in the 1970's and 80's. And that is what we must also say in the United Nations, and act accordingly.

Chileans subscribe fully to a broad concept of freedom and emancipation under which respect for human rights - along with economic and social development, peace and security - is one of the pillars of the mission of the United Nations in this new century.

And we would like to contribute our experience and commitment to the new Human Rights Council.

Its aim is to serve as the keystone of the human rights system in the coming decades.

We believe that Chile has something to say and something to contribute to the consolidation of the work of the United Nations in this field.

Let me add that it is also my belief that civil organizations - which, in the past, have been crucial in providing information and pointing out new areas in which there is work still to be done in strengthening the dignity of people - will continue to play a key role in the future.

The world today faces challenges and problems that are very diverse, but which also call for the participation and watchfulness of its citizens.

As regards human rights, the work of this organization and other similar organizations will be vital in guaranteeing the coherence and consistency of the international human rights system as well as for the system's independence, its unshakeable adherence to the principle of the dignity of all men and women, and its vocation to serve the cause of building a world in which each and every person enjoys the same protection and respect.

My friends at Human Rights Watch:

I would again like to thank you again for this invitation.

Being here with you today reminds me that the suffering of thousands of Chilean men and women was not in vain; that, through our joint efforts, we have been able to vanquish the fear which was the chosen weapon of those who tried to impose their will through force.

There are things about which it is never easy to talk about, but which I would like to share with you today: I know what it is to be blindfolded.

I know what it feels like when fear is used in a bid to subjugate.

But the belief in ideas, the desire for liberty and the hunger for justice are far, far stronger than oppression and injustice. That is the strength of the human spirit.

Those who violate human rights, who assassinate and torture do not comprehend the strength that springs from human dignity.

I will return home treasuring this meeting not only on my own account but, most importantly, on behalf of Chile.

Because today we can speak a universal language of respect, care for life and the defense of human dignity.

And, thanks to people like you, thanks to the sacrifices and suffering of so many, the people of my country are today building their future in peace.

Thank you very much.