

Address to the special sitting of the senate of the Republic of Chile

Valparaiso, 8 June 2005

Mr. President of the Senate,
Mr President of the Chamber of Deputies,
Honourable Members of the National Congress
Ladies and Gentlemen:

The geographers have told us that 9212 kilometres separate our two capital cities of Tshwane/Pretoria and Santiago de Chile. But they also tell us that the ancient European cities of Athens and Rome, famed for many achievements and extraordinary contributions to human civilisation, are nearer to us than is our sister capital city, Santiago de Chile - the one separated from our capital by 7059km, and the other by 7675km.

Spanish Madrid of the Conquistadores and Cervantes, the creator of the outstanding anti-hero, Don Quijote, is but a mere 8054km away from our capital city.

Even distant Moscow, known for the icy winters of the North and the creative dreams of great writers such as Alexander Pushkin, Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Maxim Gorky, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and Anna Akhmatova, is at 9101km, closer to us than Santiago de Chile.

Polish Warsaw that brings back memories of the heroic uprising of the Jewish people against the Nazi genocidaires, is but a mere 8695km away from our own capital city.

To reach Santiago de Chile, close to the western shores of the great Pacific, and Valparaiso on the Pacific, we left Africa from Cape Town, the southern-most city on the eastern shores of the vast Atlantic Ocean. Even in the mind's eye we can see that the Mediterranean waters that separate us from the European cities we have mentioned, are but a great intercontinental lake compared to the oceans that separate and help to define our countries.

You will ask why I come to this important representative assembly of the will of the people of Chile to speak to you about geographic distances among the capital cities of the world.

And I will answer that I have spoken thus because I want to say that the actuality of the geographic distance between Tshwane/Pretoria and Santiago de Chile disguises the fact that historical circumstance has in time past and in future time, determined that the South African heartbeat must keep pace with the beat of the hearts of the people of Chile.

Not so long ago, our people were obliged to make great sacrifices to respond to the apartheid crime against humanity. As many died on our streets and in the jails of the oppressors, tourists from Europe and elsewhere in the world, as well as others who did not have the will or the possibility to see the reality of our agony, came to our country to enjoy themselves or seek commercial profit.

We thought then, that none should visit apartheid South Africa and perhaps inadvertently communicate the wrong message that apartheid South Africa was a normal member of the community of nations. We spoke out as loudly as we could saying - isolate and do not visit apartheid South Africa!

And still those who would not hear came, their visits falsely communicating a message of normality in our country, even as a racist tyranny expressed its brutal might by shooting down the patriots of our land in cold blood.

It was obvious that we had run out of native word images to communicate our rage. What others who came from beyond our shores did by ignoring our pleas, said to us that we had to take exceptional measures to express our outrage.

At a loss for the right native words to communicate the simple message that those who have ears to hear, let them hear and those who have eyes to see, let them see, we did not turn to those geographically closer to us, like those born and raised in the great cities of Europe we have mentioned.

Instead, he called upon a great son of the Chilean people, Pablo Neruda, to give us the words we sought among ourselves and could not find.

One after the other, our voices recited the famous words written by Pablo Neruda, and well known to you, which he entitled - "Explico algunas cosas". (I am explaining a few Things.)

"Generales traidores;

Mirad mi casa muerta,

Miras España rota:

Pero de cada casa muerta sale metal ardiendo en vez de flores,

pero de cada hueco de España sale España pero de cada niño muerto sale un fusil con ojos,

pero de cada crimen nacen balas que os hallarán un día el sitio del corazón.

Preguntaréis por qué su poesía no nos habla del sueño, de las hojas de los grandes volcanes de su país natal?

Venid a ver la sangre por las calles.

venid a ver la sangre por las calles, venid a ver la sangre por las calles !"

("Traacherous generals:

see my dead house, look at broken Spain:

from every house burning metal flows instead of flowers, from every socket of Spain

Spain emerges and from every dead child a rifle with eyes, and from every crime bullets are born which will one day find the bull's eye of your hearts.

And you will ask: why doesn't his poetry speak of dreams and leaves and the great volcanoes of his native land?

Come and see the blood in the streets.

Come and see the blood in the streets.

Come and see the blood in the streets!")

To address those who would not respond to what we said in our own native words, we used as our own, the word of a Chilean fellow-combatant for liberty and said - "Venid a ver la sangre por las calles."

Pablo Neruda has spoken of the blood on the streets of the country of the Conquistadores. As they laid waste to the ancient civilisations of the Inca and the Maya and the Mapuche, the conquistadors would not have known that the curse of the blood of the innocents of the Americas would visit them many centuries later, as witnessed by a Chilean descendant who was implacably opposed to all oppression and tyranny.

But he too, as he wrote, "Venid a ver la sangre por las calles", could not have foreseen that a few decades later, a successor to the heroic heritage of the Mapuche, Salvador Allende, would shed his blood and lose his life at the Moneda Palace in Santiago de Chile.

He would not have known that many years later, it would be from the same Madrid where he had seen blood in the streets that he would, at a distance, see blood flow in the streets of his own native land.

We too did not know the fate that awaited us at the hands of the racist tyrants, that would tell us that to express our revulsion at the slaughter of the innocent, and mobilise our people and the peoples of the world to oppose and defeat the apartheid crime against humanity, we would borrow the mighty words of a Chilean poet and patriot. But we did.

We came closer still to the Chilean people when even during their own difficult years as they suffered under a military dictatorship, with many of them driven into exile as we were, they nevertheless stood up wherever they were and joined the international struggle to end the apartheid system. That defined the people of this land as fellow combatants for the liberation of South Africa.

What you did inspired us too, even as we continued to confront our own monsters, also to stand and add our voice to the sacred call for the liberation of the people of Chile from the military dictatorship.

And because Chilean and South African eyes were filled with rage from seeing burning metal, from witnessing the innocent eyes of dead children; because they had enough of smelling the stench of blood in the streets; because their minds craved for poetry that spoke of hopes that could be fulfilled and dreams that had to be realised, these courageous peoples at both ends of the Atlantic -constituted as workers, intellectuals, women, youth and political activists - ensured that freedom and democracy became a living reality in our countries.

As our freedom approached, we had to decide how it would be that the formerly oppressed and the former oppressors could live together in peace in a liberated South Africa. To answer this question, once more we turned to Chile to give us the lead.

We had come to know that despite all the pain and anger, the suffering and torment occasioned by repression, by the absence of democracy and respect for human and peoples' rights, the people of Chile had given to the world a true gift of reconciliation.

And so it came about that once more we turned to the Chilean people to learn what we could do to heal the wounds of the past, to forgive without forgetting, to create the stability we needed to be able to build a new and humane South Africa. You gave us the gift of your Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which we reproduced in our own country to contain the demons that might have turned our country apart. Undoubtedly, in both our countries, the legacy that should live forever is the stunning generosity of those who bore the brunt of brutal repression and oppression.

In the past eleven years many of our fellow citizens and some around the world, even those with agnostic inclinations, described our transition to democracy, including the processes of reconciliation, as a miracle. We erred by not telling them that -we learnt from our fellow combatants for justice! We learned from Chile!

Today, we have come to Chile - its capital city 9212 kilometres away from our own - because there are many more things we can still share and learn from each other, so that the extraordinary human efforts that evoked the biblical image of a miracle should further inspire us as we address the challenges of poverty, underdevelopment and marginalisation.

I am pleased to report to this august assembly that we have agreed with your outstanding son, President Ricardo Lagos and the government he leads, that we should do everything possible to strengthen the bonds of friendship and solidarity formed during the difficult years when it would have been very easy to ignore each other's suffering and each other's struggle.

Our countries share many things. We are both major producers of minerals and agricultural products. The seas also provide us with food and jobs. We face the common challenge to eradicate poverty and underdevelopment in our countries and bridge the enormous disparities that separate the wealthy from the poor in our societies.

We are trading nations, dependent for the welfare of the masses of our peoples on mutually beneficial interactions and trade with all countries of the world. We also have the shared responsibility to protect the Antarctic Continent threatened as it is by the menace of global warming, which threatens all of us with disastrous consequences.

All these factors point to the imperative for us to intensify our bilateral cooperation in all fields, not least of all the direct contact between our respective peoples through tourism, sport, educational and cultural exchanges.

Responding to this, we have agreed with the President and Government of the Republic of Chile to ensure as a matter of urgency that we strengthen our mechanisms for cooperation, to respond together to the task to pursue the goal of a better life for both our peoples. This will be done.

Inspired by your achievements in reconciliation, democracy and economic development, and driven by our own determination to be true to the egalitarian social conscience of our forebears and the traditions of our struggle, we are pleased to report to you, Honourable Members of the National Congress of Chile, that since our liberation 11 years ago, we have made visible progress towards changing the lives of our people for the better. We are certain that by improving and intensifying our cooperation, we will achieve even faster progress towards achieving the goal of a better life for all.

This has been achieved on a solid foundation of democracy, human rights, human dignity and justice because the better life our people seek cannot be mortgaged to autocracy and authoritarianism.

Indeed, this esteemed gathering of the representatives of the citizens of Chile, communicates the message that to propel our society forward, we must at all times, respect the will of the people.

Coming from a continent that has been marginalised for centuries, we are very encouraged and strengthened to be among you, Chileans, because our countries are united and have a common agenda to work for a just and equitable global order, central to which is respect for the voices of all nations in the ordering of world affairs, especially during this period of globalisation.

Accordingly, I am confident we will work together to achieve effective and significant reform of the United Nations. In addition, our representatives have worked and will continue to work together to achieve an early conclusion to the Doha Development Round of the WTO.

We will also continue to collaborate to advance South-South co-operation, especially ensuring more focussed and closer relations between our regional bodies. We are indeed encouraged by the recent

developments in your region that led to the establishment of the South American Community of Nations. We are confident that this important body will soon play the role it should in global affairs.

We were greatly encouraged by the Summit Meeting last month between the countries of South America and those of the Arab world and trust that there will be similar engagements with the African Union. It is our hope that the strengthening of these relations will, among other things, contribute to the resolution of the Israeli/Palestinian question, which remains a major threat to peace in the Middle East and the world.

As you are aware, the African Union has launched its development programme, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which has embarked on a number of processes towards the regeneration of Africa by ensuring the sustainable development of all our countries.

As is self-evident from the name, this programme is predicated on partnerships, among the African countries themselves, between the African countries and other countries and regions of the South and between Africa and the developed countries of the North.

Clearly, despite the separation of more than 9 000 kilometres and the separation occasioned by the vast, turbulent and cold Atlantic Ocean, it is natural that we partner Chile and the South American Community of Nations as, together, we respond to the desires and aspirations of our peoples and confront the challenges posed by contemporary human society.

Our shared history demonstrates that the actuality of the geographic distance between Tshwane/Pretoria and Santiago de Chile disguises the fact that historical circumstance has in time past and in future time, determined that the South African and the African heartbeat must keep pace with the beat of the hearts of the people of Chile and those of South America.

Relevant to this relationship between us, in his poem, "The Watersong Ends", Pablo Neruda said:

"For my part and yours, we comply; we share our hopes and winters...

we go on loving love and in our blunt way

we bury the liars and live among the truth-tellers."

Esteemed Presidents of the Chilean Houses of Parliament and Honourable Members;

None among us from South Africa, who are privileged to be here today, have a sense that more than 9 000 kilometres separate us, because in Chile, we actually feel at home. I thank you most sincerely for inviting us to visit the Chilean National Congress and to share a few thoughts with you.

I thank you for your attention.