

Ricardo Lagos Escobar

Doctor of Laws

An accomplished scholar, a courageous activist in the struggle for the return to democracy in his beloved country, and a distinguished public servant, Ricardo Lagos Escobar, President of the Republic of Chile, is widely recognized today as a leading statesman in the hemisphere, advocating democracy and human rights and promoting policies that provide for economic growth and human development.

President Lagos began his university studies at the age of sixteen, and received a law degree from the University of Chile. He launched his academic career by graduating with distinction on the basis of his thesis on "The Concentration of Economic Power," which also became a widely acclaimed book. He went on to receive a Ph.D. in economics from Duke University and returned to Chile to become a distinguished professor of economics and law at the University of Chile. President Lagos's ties to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill also extend back to this period, when he forged a lifelong friendship with Federico Gil, Director of the Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, over many decades. Following the military coup of 1973 in his country, President Lagos came to Carolina as a William Rand Kenan Jr. Visiting Professor of Latin American Studies. During the year he was here, he helped organize a conference with Chapel Hill colleagues that resulted in the published volume *Chile at the Turning Point*.

In the 1980s Ricardo Lagos played a central role in the effort to regain Chilean democracy. As a moderate socialist, he was instrumental in forging a broad multi-party Democratic Alliance. He advanced the risky but ultimately successful strategy of defeating the dictatorship through its own rules by agreeing to participate in a plebiscite that would determine whether General Pinochet would remain in office for another eight years. At no time was his reputation for being honest and direct more dramatically illustrated than during a television interview when Lagos looked directly at the camera, pointed at an imaginary Pinochet, and told him, "You are promising the country eight more years of torture, assassination and human rights violations," adding, "I speak for fifteen years of silence."

Since the return to democracy in 1990, Lagos has served his country with creativity, dignity and honor. As Minister of Education, he encouraged decentralization and focused particular attention and resources on the schools with the worst performance records, dramatically improving them. As Minister of Public Works, he advanced ambitious projects of public investment as well as innovative programs involving private sector participation. In two campaigns he also learned a lesson most democratic politicians must confront at some point: elections can be lost as well as won. Then, having earned the nomination of the Concertation for Democracy coalition, in January 2000 he won the presidency in a hard fought election over two rounds. In a period when democratic national leaders around the globe are confronting dramatic new challenges, President Lagos exemplifies the very best in public service.

For outstanding contributions to humanity in the cause of democracy and human rights in his native land, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is honored to confer upon His Excellency the President of Chile Roberto Lagos Escobar the degree of Doctor of Laws.

[Awarded at a special Convocation on November 2, 2001.]