

Ricardo Lagos



“Our world faces many grave problems that require us to join hands and share our different experiences.”

Former President of Chile; tenacious fighter for democracy and human rights; implemented health reform and reduced economic inequality while diversifying Chile’s external trade in the era of globalisation.

- President of Chile, 2000-2006
- UN Special Envoy on Climate Change, 2007-2010
- Commissioner for the WHO’s Commission on the Social Determinants of Health, 2005-2008
- Professor-at-large on International Relations at Brown University, 2008-2015
- Appointed Commissioner for the Global Commission on Drug Policy, 2011
- Joined The Elders, 2016

Work with The Elders

Ricardo Lagos joined The Elders in 2016, remaining an active member of the group until stepping down in February 2024 to become an Elder Emeritus.

A national symbol for democracy in his home country Chile, President Lagos is passionate about addressing injustices and is a globally recognised voice on issues of health and climate change.

As an Elder, Ricardo Lagos has joined many trips and delegations to advocate for the advancement of these issues, including to China, Ethiopia, Japan, South Africa, the United States, and the Vatican. He has met with world leaders including Xi Jinping and Pope Francis,

and participated in workshops with civil society groups on issues such as democratic transitions, climate change and equitable health reform.

Ricardo Lagos regularly voices his opinion on the need for access to quality healthcare for all. At the Universal Health Coverage Forum in Tokyo in 2017, he addressed world leaders, youth advocates, celebrity champions and civil society to reflect on Chile's experience, and called on political leaders to make Universal Health Coverage their top priority.

President Lagos is also a passionate advocate for women's rights and has spoken out on the widespread issue of femicide in Latin America.

Standing up for democracy in Pinochet's Chile

After a career in academia and diplomacy, as a lawyer and economist, Ricardo Lagos was forced into exile in 1973 following a military coup by General Augusto Pinochet, where he remained until the late 1970s.

He tenaciously led efforts to restore democracy to the country, which ultimately led to the resignation of General Pinochet and the restoration of civilian rule. His memorable intervention on live television in 1988, challenging General Pinochet's attempt to extend his rule by nationwide plebiscite, was seen as a pivotal moment in Chile's transition.

He later served as Minister for Education, and Minister for Public Works in the mid-1990s under Presidents Patricio Aylwin and Eduardo Frei, and in 2000, he was elected President of Chile, twelve years after helping to lead his country back to democracy after Pinochet's dictatorship.

President of Chile

Ricardo Lagos was elected President of Chile in 2000 and served for six years for the centre-left *Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia* coalition. President Lagos' legacy is influenced by efforts to reduce inequality and increase economic wellbeing. During his presidency, improvements were made to the country's infrastructure and transport; a health programme guaranteeing coverage for a number of medical conditions was introduced; and compulsory schooling was extended to 12 years.

The incidence of extreme poverty in Chile was significantly reduced during his tenure, partly due to the 'Chile Barrio' housing programme, a new unemployment insurance scheme and the 'Chile Solidario' Programme. His administration also secured several important free-trade agreements, including with the European Union, the United States and China.

President Lagos finished his Presidential term with historically high approval ratings above 70%.

Democracy and human rights advocate

After leaving office, Ricardo Lagos founded the [Fundación Democracia y Desarrollo](#) in 2006, a Santiago-based organisation aiming to promote democracy and development. Focusing on fostering civic engagement through various channels, the organisation promotes democratic values, and explores technology as a means to improve democracy.

Between 2006-2008, Ricardo Lagos served as President of the [Club de Madrid](#), a group of global leaders working on governance and conflict issues, and remains a member of the organisation to this day.