

Ambassador and Mrs Moreno, I feel deeply honoured by this award and I would like to thank you and through you express my gratitude to the government of Chile.

Chile has been central to my academic and to my personal life since I first went there in 1967 to study the trade union movement. It was not however my first Latin American experience as I had spent a year previously in Colombia. Arriving in Chile I realised that I was in a very different country – above all the politics were very distinct and the ideological debates and demand for reform in Chile were much more to my liking than the family and clan centred politics of Colombia (though the coffee was not so good).

I have spent most of my academic life studying the politics of Chile except for a ten year period following the coup when it was not advisable for anyone publicly involved in the human rights campaign to visit the country. I have written extensively on Chile and I am pleased to announce that my recently published book is ranked in the order of Amazon book sales at number 550,921. However this is a rise on the previous week and I am confident of breaking the 500,000 mark.

I would like to stress that my work has benefited more than I can say from the work of Chilean scholars. Chile is fortunate in the quality of its academic community – and indeed in the bravery that many of them showed by remaining in Chile even when expelled from the universities after the coup.

My personal involvement came with my role as one of the founders and main organiser of Academics for Chile – a movement that had immense support throughout the university world in the UK and was able to bring here more than a thousand academics and students. But again I would like to stress that my role depended on the courage and persistence of those in Chile who ran terrible risks in providing us with the kind of information we needed.

Chile after Pinochet is a very different world and I found it much more congenial to write about the progress of Chilean democracy than the travails of the country under the Pinochet dictatorship. I have been in Chile at many of the most dramatic moments in its recent history. I remember participating in the mass demonstration of close on a million Chileans in the Parque O'Higgins in 1985 with the chant of el que no salta es Pinochet (a good way to combine political protest with exercise); and most of all being one of the observers in that most dramatic of days in October 1988 when Pinochet lost the plebiscite. Elections since then have seemed rather tame by comparison.

However, one of the most attractive features of Chilean elections is that they are held in December which means that I and my wife after the elections are able to spend the holidays travelling around your beautiful country. I will oppose any move to change the date of elections to earlier in the year. My only unfulfilled ambition is to feature in the pagina social of El Mercurio.

Finally and once more can I say how privileged and proud I feel to have been made this award.