

Senor Espinoza, Pauline, my family and friends,

I would like to join Pauline and thank the Chilean Government for the great honour bestowed on us and to all those who worked so remarkably with Chilean refugees. It was at the darkest times of a dictatorship over 30 years ago. I, too, am delighted to accept this honour, proposed and agreed by two different governments. Like a Grand Chilean wine, it tastes even better with age.

Pauline and I (with so many of you here tonight) worked in unity all those years ago..... Pauline spoke on behalf of both of us in describing the programme. She mentioned the tragedies and persecution that many Chileans faced in 1970; both of us were inspired by their courage and determination.

In 1973, WUS was a small organisation with only 5 staff.

There were an extraordinary number of problems to overcome, both personal and organisational in the UK and in Latin America. There were no effective structures. As the General Secretary of WUS, I was acutely aware of the considerable opposition there was in some powerful quarters to responding to the persecution. Our refugee programmes faced complexity and challenges at every stage, then and throughout the programme. Major challenges were presented by some in our own British Government Ministries.

I had the privilege of working with Academics for Chile to initiate the programme in 1973. The remarkable practical and enduring commitment of many academics transformed a sometimes hostile environment.

During a period of 6 months, 50 academics and post graduates were found places in Universities. Additionally over £39,000 was raised, providing the platform for major governmental funding of £11 million over the duration of the programme.

The outstanding support of the Chile Committee for Human Rights, the Joint Working Group for Chilean Refugees, and a range of other organisations, was central to the success of the work. We worked as a team with Pauline, myself and our WUS colleagues, for what seemed like all hours of the day and night.

People were highly professional and fully committed. These honours recognise all of us, inside and outside WUS, for work we can all be proud of.

This experience was also life changing for me too. I journeyed on from WUS in the early 1980s to be one of the founding staff of the British Refugee Council. It is one of the enduring structures that emerged from the lessons learnt from the Chilean Refugee programme. There some of the most creative and committed staff we employed were Chileans. They worked with the Chilean exile community but also with other refugees.

My human rights journey continued in the 90s with Minority Rights Group International, where we worked with marginalised groups, who sometimes faced discrimination and persecution. Here some colleagues were old Chilean friends.

One of the wonderful consequences of this award is that it has brought me together again with other long lost friends and colleagues. I do hope this is a new beginning. I hope that even now we can work together to learn humanitarian and development lessons for the future and renew friendships.

My wife Hilary has been with me through a beautiful 40 year journey together, while two of our three children, Jessica and Simon are with us tonight. It is in fact Simon's and his twin sister Alison's birthday today. Sadly Alison is in Cambodia, but her Irish partner Oisin is here. Words cannot express how much they mean to me and how much I celebrate their own contribution to society.

I cannot claim to have an Irish mother, however my grandparents were Beamishes and Hennesys and- like Bernardo O'Higgins- had an Irish ancestry. Like Bernardo O Higgins, many people, who were involved with our programme or who were refugees in Europe, played an important part in developing democracy in Chile.

As we know, two of them became President of Chile, while many others have made major contributions to society in Britain, in Chile and elsewhere.

Senor Espinoza, today we are celebrating the courage of the people of Chile, May I propose a toast to Chilean Democracy. Thank you.

