Translation of Speech by Foreign Minister Mr. José Miguel Insulza

Your Excellency, Don Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle, Your Majesties King Kari XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia of Sweden, Mr. President of the ESO Council, Mr. Director General of ESO, Senators, civil, military and church officials, Members of the Swedish delegation, Members of the ESO Council, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to represent the Chilean Government in this ceremony and to share with you my feeling of excitement and hope as we take part in this foundation ceremony of ESO’s at Cerro Paranal. This feeling is, first of all, based upon the importance of the project that we inaugurate today. The VLT/VLTI telescope already described by the President of the ESO Council and by the Director General of ESO, is not only an expression of the most modern technology ever used in astronomy. It is also an opportunity to deepen our knowledge of the Universe and thus be able to answer the questions that have occupied mankind since its origin. In this sense, over and above the significant cost entailed by the project, it will be a
milestone for the development of astronomy at a national and global level.

My satisfaction becomes even greater, when considering the long and winding path that Chile and ESO had to follow these last years, to reach this place and this occasion. We all know of the difficulties encountered and the misunderstandings, which have now been happily overcome, but which at some point threatened the completion of this project.

However, I believe it is important to say that during that process the Government permanently supported ESO, in order to enable the Organisation to continue developing and extending its activities in Chile. We did this not only because of the international commitment undertaken by the State and to follow Chilean tradition in honouring engagements of international treaties but also because we thought that the development of ESO’s activities in the country, within a clear legal frame, would not only benefit world science, but also Chile’s scientific development in its most important regions.

Our point of view is validated today, since the Paranal Observatory will not only benefit ESO’s activities but will also redound to the benefit of Chilean scientists who will thus have access to a facility which would otherwise have been completely beyond their reach.

For this reason, this ceremony, which follows the signing of the Instruments of Ratification and Approval of the Interpretative, Supplementary and Amending Agreement of the 1963 Convention, constitutes not only the end of a difficult process, but also the beginning of a new relationship of co-operation and understanding between Chile and ESO, which is a mature, consolidated and equal relationship in which both parties benefit.

The consolidation of the legal-political relationship between Chile and ESO warrants a steady development for ESO’s activities, within a framework of mutual benefit and also warrants the extension of these activities in the future.

Furthermore, through the recognition of the legitimate aspirations of the national sectors more directly involved in ESO’s activities, an equal relationship is established, because the acknowledgement of the rights of Chile and its citizens in labour and scientific matters constitute an adequate counterpart to Chile’s contribution to ESO.

By establishing permanent bodies of co-operation and for the resolution of controversies between Chile and ESO, the Organisation Chilean researchers and professors, during their years of exile in Sweden, as well as for the support given to a great number of national Chilean and foreign guests, may redound to a greater knowledge of the Universe, as well as to clearer benefits for ESO, for its Member States, one of which is the Kingdom of Sweden, and for Chile. In this spirit I would like to express my best wishes for the success of this new adventure in science.

Thank you very much.

Translation of Speech by H.E. President Eduardo Frei

Your Majesties, Excellencies, Ambassadors, authorities, and a very special greeting to the President of the ESO Council, Dr. Peter Creola, and the Director General, Prof. Giacconi, esteemed friend.

As I contemplate this enterprise, in the middle of the desert, made possible through the joint effort of a group of European countries, their scientific communities and astronomers, on one hand, and of the Chilean nation, its workers, engineers and scientists, on the other, I feel not only deeply gratified but, also, extremely proud.

This is a concrete signal of how our country is becoming increasingly inserted in the international community. And not only in economic terms.

It is certainly true that our country is, nowadays, closely linked to international trade. This year we have completed our association with the MERCOSUR. We have achieved strong ties with the European Union and, for the first time in history, we have signed a Free Trade Agreement with an industrialised country: Canada.

But there are other aspects as well, where we are becoming positively integrated to the rest of the world. Today, our political relations with the community of nations are at a very high level, which would have seemed unfeasible a few years ago. Democracy has brought us closer to the rest of the world and has restored the prestige historically enjoyed by the nation.

In the field of scientific co-operation we have also made progress. The establishment of this observatory is a good example of it. Astronomers from Europe and other countries will come and work here, and the most prominent Chilean astronomers will be given the opportunity of carrying out their research projects.

This opens multiple opportunities for collaboration and creates an extremely valuable platform for training young Chilean astronomers. Our main universities will benefit, as well as the country as a whole, since we will have the seat of one of the most advanced astronomical observatories in the world.

I believe that all these joint activities with industrially and scientifically advanced countries are vitally important, since our own challenge, as far as modernisation is concerned, is the challenge of upgrading our own capabilities in the fields of science and technology.