

Translation of the Speech by H.E. the President of the Republic of Chile, Don Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle, at the Inauguration of the Paranal Observatory, 5th March 1999

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great satisfaction for me to inaugurate what is soon to become the most powerful telescope in the world, which will clearly respond to the essential human urge of exploring and learning about the origins and mysteries of the universe.

It will be here, in the middle of the Chilean desert, almost three thousand metres above sea level, that scientists from all over the planet will converge, to investigate the great issues of astrophysics, such as the origin, evolution and future of the universe; the formation of great structures, galaxies, stars and their life cycles, as well as the formation and evolution of planets, allowing us to learn about physical and chemical conditions appropriate for the development of life.

Historically, this northern region of Chile has supplied our major source of wealth, hidden in the entrails of the earth. Courageous copper miners continue, up to this day, to contribute to the development of this country, by supplying the world with valuable raw materials.

As from now, not only will the depths of the earth be explored from this region, but also the skies, thanks to the excellent climate that offers crystal clear skies, ideal for astronomy.

An extensive Association with Europe

Several aspects converge into this initiative, which I would like to highlight:

First, the Government of Chile and ESO have maintained, for over three decades, a relationship of extensive co-operation. As one of the most ambitious scientific projects of the century materialises today, we ratify this permanent vocation for service and collaboration.

This is a concrete example of the fact that the path towards our association with the main European nations is not restricted to financial or commercial issues. It also includes other significant challenges and tasks, which confer a transcendental sense to human beings and to their relation with the world.

Incorporation of Chilean Scientists to Astronomical Observation

Chilean scientists will gain special access to this centre of astronomical observation. This will constitute a substantial contribution to the work of our researchers, who will have the most modern technology at hand, for their studies, enabling their interaction with colleagues from other latitudes, thus contributing to scientific advancement.

Efforts of the Government in Favour of Science

This project is attached to the efforts of my government to promote science in our country. As we all know, we have increased our support to scientific research. We have established the Presidential Chairs, placing our trust in prominent researchers, who have been chosen by a high-level committee. I can modestly say that this initiative, started in this small country, where researchers have entered the home of the Presidents of Chile, with all dignity due to their task, stands out today within the international scientific community.

Before the end of my tenure, this effort will become consolidated and made evident in a transcendental project we call the Millennium Scientific Initiative, which has aroused interest and funding from the World Bank. This effort is designed to ensure that, within

the next ten years, this country can incorporate national talents into the world's process of scientific advancement. Chile cannot remain behind. We must innovate our ways of dealing with science, encourage youth and, thus, leave a trail of our own in the world of the next millennium.

From this place, a magnificent evidence of man's capability, I would like to tell all Chileans that the Millennium Initiative has sparked extraordinary interest within the main scientific circles and international agencies. It is considered a prototype for developing countries to address their insertion into one of the most important aspects of globalisation, that is to say, scientific discovery.

Final Words

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to congratulate all those who have made the concretion of this initiative possible, certainly including the Chilean technical and professional staff who participated in the construction of these magnificent facilities. I feel proud, as a Chilean, that this desert-like region of our country will render, to humanity, the possibility of deciphering the countless mysteries that have challenged mankind throughout history.

Scientists will observe, from this desert, these blue, starlit skies. We, Chileans, are opening our eyes and our minds, through knowledge, education and our active participation in the exploration of new frontiers. Let us continue to think big, let us continue to project ourselves into the third millennium, continue our commitment with our educational reform, making decisions in favour of people. This is how the barriers that separate us from development will be overcome.

Thank you very much.

Publications in Refereed Journals Based on Telescope Observations

J. BERGERON and U. GROTHKOPF, ESO

ESO's broad objective is to provide the astronomical communities in the member states with first-class optical-infrared facilities. During the past few years, major efforts were dedicated to

the refurbishment and upgrading of all the telescopes at the La Silla Observatory as well as the restructuring of the Observatory in telescope and service teams.

The effectiveness of an observatory can be measured by its scientific productivity. To this end, we conducted a statistical study of the publications based on observations with ESO and other world-