

Speech Delivered by Bill Shipsey, Chairman of Art for Amnesty

(Delivered in Spanish) The only words I know in Spanish I learnt from a U2 album – “Unos – Dos – Tres – Quatorse!” And Bono thinks that it is Gaelic.

25 years ago the people of Chile celebrated Pablo Neruda's Nobel Prize victory on his return from Stockholm in this Stadium. Unfortunately and tragically two years later the Stadium was turned into a concentration camp in which thousands were imprisoned and hundred tortured and killed. Now we are gathered in this hallowed ground to celebrate the lives and work of another group of artists and to perform what in human rights terms is a form of 'exorcism' for the Stadium.

Firstly, we in Amnesty want to pay tribute to all human rights defenders in Chile past and present and to say how honoured and humbled we are to have present representatives of Chilean human rights organisations who kept the flame of hope alive and, to quote Seamus Heaney, “the wick of self respect from dying out” in the long dark days of the recent past.

We are also honoured that the President Elect of Chile, Dr Michelle Bachelet, herself no stranger to the plight of victims of torture and grave human rights abuses, has agreed to present this Award on our behalf. There is clearly much to be done on behalf of those who continue to suffer human rights abuses across Latin America and the world. Human Rights need to be at the heart of all Government policies and we are confident that President Bachelet will ensure that the programs of her Government will set an example to the rest of the region and the rest of the world. Whether it be Sarajevo or Santiago, Belfast or Baghdad, there must be no impunity for past human rights abuses.

In the mythical Republic of Seamus Heaney's poem which inspired this Award, public leaders are required at their inauguration 'to weep to atone for their presumption to hold office'. There is no such requirement in the real world republics, but nonetheless we hope that you President Bachelet will fulfil the promise of human rights for all the citizens of Chile. We approach this event with renewed faith and confidence. We in Amnesty International represent a disposition rather than a party line. We are disposed to believe that human rights are sacred and that we are all responsible, that is answerable, for ensuring their protection.

We also believe that the work of artists, of whom U2 are almost unequalled, can promote a new order of understanding that precedes and prepares for the establishment of new social and indeed new legislative conditions. And so to Adam, Bono, Edge, Larry and Paul we thank you for carrying the candle, and in your case, the spotlight for Amnesty for over twenty years. Thank you for amplifying our message. And thank you for your 'art and ardency in the light of conscience'. And to show what good teachers of Spanish U2 are.

(Delivered in Spanish) We have always regarded you as our Ambassadors. Today is only the official and public recognition of what has been the fact for many years.

It is my great honour and pleasure to invite Dr Michelle Bachelet President Elect of Chile to the podium to present the Award. Thank you.

Bill Shipsey, Art for Amnesty
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