

Biographical Sketch: Michelle Bachelet



Michelle Bachelet, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women, was born in Santiago, Chile, on 29 September 1951. She has three children.

She is trained as a doctor, with graduate studies in Military Sciences. She speaks Spanish and English and has a command in German, French and Portuguese.

Her father, Alberto Bachelet, was a General in the Chilean Air Force under Salvador Allende. After the coup of General Augusto Pinochet Alberto Bachelet died in a Chilean prison in 1974 having suffered a heart attack after being tortured during his imprisonment. Despite the traumatic events that affected her family and her country, Michelle Bachelet continued studying and participating in Chile's Socialist Party. In 1975 Michelle Bachelet and her mother were arrested by the Pinochet secret police.

After their arrest and subsequent release Bachelet and her mother traveled to Australia as exiles. From there, they continued on to East Germany, where Michelle Bachelet studied German, in Leipzig, and then enrolled at Humboldt University medical school in Berlin. While living in Germany, she married a fellow Chilean exile. Michelle Bachelet returned to Chile in 1979, and continued her studies in medicine at the University of Chile. She graduated as a surgeon in 1982.

Once democracy was restored in 1990 Michelle Bachelet worked in the health sector of Chile for a number of years.

In 2000, Michelle Bachelet was named Minister of Health in President Ricardo Lagos' administration. She found herself at the head of an organization with more than 70,000 workers and a nationwide network of public health services; it also supervises, either directly or indirectly, autonomous municipal health services and the private healthcare system.

On 7 January 2002, President Lagos reshuffled his Cabinet and moved Michelle Bachelet to head of the Defence Ministry. She was the first woman both in Chile and in Latin America to hold such a position. On 1 October 2004, Michelle Bachelet resigned from the Defence Ministry. She was then free to fully focus on her presidential campaign.

In a run-off presidential election held on 15 February 2006, Michelle Bachelet won 53.49 percent of the vote and thus became the first woman to be elected President in the history of the Republic of Chile. She held this office for four years, serving her full term, which ended on 11 March 2010 with the greatest approval from people in the history of Chile.