

Salvador Allende: respect for the world

When Salvador Allende entered the General Assembly of the United Nations, a very exceptional thing happened: there was huge, spontaneous applause from the delegates, who rose to their feet. At the end of his speech, the president of Chile was again cheered at length with a persistent standing ovation. This only happened once again, with Nelson Mandela, after his release.

Allende's UN standing ovation was on 4 December 1972, after he had had two years in power and was being beset by clear efforts to prevent his government's normal development, despite his party gaining more and more voters in the successive elections of local authorities. Powerful external and internal interests tried to impede Allende's election at all costs and to destabilise his government. The Church Committee report of the US Senate (1976) describes in detail the alliance between the Nixon government and important leaders of the Chilean oligarchy. **Allende was considered a dangerous example for countries in Latin America and the Third World, who could seek to imitate the Chilean example.**



Salvador Allende at the United Nations General Assembly (December 4, 1972).

Documentation Center of the Salvador Allende Foundation

“I come from Chile, a small country, but where today all citizens are free to express themselves as they prefer, with unrestricted cultural, religious and ideological tolerance, where racial discrimination has no place.” The UN General Assembly was confronted with a true international leader and felt a connection with him.

“We, the underdeveloped countries, condemned to second-class realities, always subordinate. This is the model that the Chilean working class, by imposing itself

as the protagonist of its own future, has resolved to reject, seeking instead an accelerated, autonomous and own development, by revolutionising the traditional structures.”

The minutes of applause were not just for the speech; they were directed at the human being standing in front of his audience, and at his innovative ideals. **A doctor and socialist politician who throughout his life had fought to give dignity to the people and make Chile a just society in democracy, pluralism and freedom.** The applause was a great symbol of solidarity. A way of saying, “President, we are with you”.

And this is perhaps one of Salvador Allende’s main international legacies: solidarity with the struggle of the Chilean people. During his government there were multiple examples of political and popular support, as well as support from the unions. After his death, a huge condemnation of the civil-military coup in Chile erupted, triggering a spontaneous reaction of solidarity with the recovery of democracy and human rights in the most diverse parts of the world, particularly in Europe. Allende’s tragic death gave rise to enormous respect due to its historical consequences and the incentive it created to open the doors to thousands of exiles.

At the UN Assembly, he stated that Chile was “a country that [...] has never deviated from the fulfilment of its international obligations and now cultivates friendly relations with all the countries of the world. **It is true that we have differences with some of them, but there are none that we are not willing to discuss with, using the multilateral or bilateral instruments that we have subscribed to.** Our respect for treaties is invariable.”

The principle of people’s self-determination was at the heart of Allende’s international vision, along with national autonomy and a solid system of cooperation between equals. Chile had a great role in strengthening these principles during Allende’s mandate, not only at home but also by establishing relations with China, Vietnam, and countries of the Soviet bloc. **Those were visionary decisions, given that today the axes of geopolitics and the global economy are moving towards Asia Pacific.**

Furthermore, Chile’s adherence to the Non-Aligned Movement under Allende established a new space for political cooperation.

In the international arena, Allende’s government displayed the greatest energy and creativity in the United Nations and in development issues. Here, some examples:

- UNCTAD III was held in Chile with the participation of a hundred countries to advance the main problems of trade and development in the Third World, with support from the international community. The conclusion of this session reflected many of the values of the Chilean government represented. Allende was clear: “We must replace an expired and profoundly unjust economic-commercial order.” **Years later, this inspired the UN proposals for a new international economic order.**
- Allende promoted the concept of ‘**ideological pluralism**’ as the foundation of unity in the diversity of Latin America.
- The United Nations Economic and Social Council unanimously accepted the Chilean proposal for the UN to **study the economic and political impact of**

transnational corporations. The proposal was based on the intervention of US companies like the manufacturing giant ITT and the mining company Kennecott in Chilean politics.

- Chile strongly supported the rejection of the French nuclear tests at Mururoa.
- Under Allende, Chile participated in the Environment Conference in Stockholm in 1972, which opened the way to sustainable development.
- Chile was an active member in the efforts that led to the recognition of the People's Republic of China as a legitimate member of the UN.
- When the Convention on the Law of the Sea began in 1973, Chile maintained that the sea beyond national jurisdiction should be the common good of humanity.

Perhaps the most lasting sign of respect for Salvador Allende in the world is the fact that **for millions of people he is still a source of inspiration.** This finds expression in the numerous streets, squares, schools and hospitals, for example, that all bear his name and that will be there for generations as testimony to his life.

Today, with his multilateral conviction and in the face of the terrible Covid-19 pandemic that plagues the world, the doctor Salvador Allende, former Minister of Health and creator of the Chilean public health system, **would be fighting for a great effort of international cooperation from all countries.**

We have an urgent obligation to strengthen the multilateral institutions, to modernise them and open a space for citizen presence typical of participatory democracy. The challenge is clear, and it is possible to meet: save lives today, but also tomorrow.

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