

## 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: Sebastián, Francisca, and Sofía.

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 mother, Ángela Jeria, is an archaeologist. Her father, Alberto Bachelet, was a General in the Chilean Air Force.

In 1970, Michelle Bachelet accompanied a friend to the Posta Central, a major public hospital in Santiago. Although she had previously been thinking about studying Sociology or Economics, her time at the hospital led her to study Medicine at the University of Chile, as a concrete way to relieve people's pain and improve healthcare in Chile.

A leader in student political affairs, during the Unidad Popular (Popular Unity) government of Salvador Allende she participated in the Socialist Youth movement.

Known for exceptional organizational talents developed during his time in the Air Force, General Bachelet was asked by President Allende in 1972 to head the government's Price and Supply Committees Juntas de Abastecimiento y Precios, and remained there until General Augusto Pinochet led a coup against Allende's government on 11 September 1973.

General Bachelet was arrested that same day and held captive in the Air War Academy, accused of "treason against the homeland." He was later moved from the Air War Academy to a public prison. He died there on 12 March 1974, having suffered a heart attack as a result of the strain on his body from the torture to which he was submitted.

Despite the traumatic events that affected her family and her country, Michelle Bachelet continued studying and participating in Chile's Socialist Party. On 10 January 1975, two agents from the DINA (Dirección Nacional de Inteligencia, the Pinochet regime's secret police force) came to the apartment she shared with her mother, blindfolded both of them, and took them to the Villa Grimaldi, the DINA's main torture and detention centre.

Later, both mother and daughter were moved to the Cuatro Álamos detention centre, where they remained until the end of January.

Bachelet and Jeria 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, architect Jorge Dávalos. Dávalos is the father of her two older children: Sebastián, who was born in 1978 in Leipzig, and Francisca, who was born in 1984, once the family had returned to Chile.

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.

Then she spent four years specializing in paediatrics and public health at the Roberto del Río Hospital.

She also joined different political organizations working to restore democracy to Chile, and was later hired to work in the medical section of PIDEE, an NGO that offered different types of treatment to children traumatized by dictatorship.

Once democracy was restored in 1990, there was immediately a great need for professionals to help restore the country's public health system, which had been neglected by the dictatorship on a massive scale. She was hired as an epidemiologist at the Metropolitan Health Service in western Santiago, and later moved to CONASIDA, the National AIDS Commission. During this time, she consulted for the Pan-American Health Organization, the World Health Organization and the German Technical Cooperation Agency (GTZ). Her youngest daughter, Sofía Henríquez, was born during this period as well.

In 1994, she joined the Health Ministry as a consultant on Primary Care and Healthcare Services Management issues.

Her experiences both as a member of a military family and a member of the civilian political sector led her to feel that prevailing political sentiment did not sufficiently value defence policies and their institutional, political and cultural implications. Her opinions on the matter motivated her to take a course on military strategy in the National Academy of Strategic and Political Studies (ANEPE), which she finished at the top of her class. This qualified her for a President of the Republic scholarship to take a course on Continental Defence at the Inter-American Defense College in Washington, DC in 1997, along with 35 other civilians and members of the military from all over the Americas. She returned and was immediately hired to work in the Ministry of Defence.

Michelle Bachelet was chosen by the Central Committee of the Socialist Party to run for the city council of the Santiago-area district of Las Condes in 1996. In 1998, she was chosen by the party's Central Committee to join its Political Committee, where she remained until 11 March 2000.

She worked as Ricardo Lagos' campaign manager.

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.

President Lagos gave her two main tasks to complete as Minister. The first was to improve primary care, increasing the quality and coverage of care at the country's public health clinics and eliminating long wait times for treatment at those clinics. The second was to begin preparation for a major healthcare reform program.

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.

During her tenure as Defence Minister, Chile's rules about obligatory military service were modified in key ways, the role of the Ministry and the government in military affairs was strengthened, and equal-opportunity policies were instituted for women in the military, the Carabineros Police and the Investigations Police.

On 1 October 2004, Michelle Bachelet resigned from the Defence Ministry. She was then free to fully focus on her presidential campaign, which was gathering momentum at the time thanks to overwhelming popular support for her bid. She started out by accompanying mayor and city council candidates from the governing Concertación coalition during their campaigns throughout the country.

After the municipal elections, she was proclaimed candidate for the Presidency by the PPD (Party for Democracy) and Socialist Parties.

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.

In April 2010, former President Michelle Bachelet founded and headed Dialoga Foundation, as a way to contribute to and support a renovation of ideas, action, and leadership in Chile.