

ICLC Newsletter



Laura Chinchilla Miranda

The country's first woman president (2010 – 2014)



Costa Rica President elected Laura Chinchilla Miranda is the country's first woman president. The festive Election Day on Sunday February 7, 2010 proved to be a major victory for the incumbent party of Ex-President and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Oscar Arias.

Chinchilla's National Liberation Party did not get a good majority in congress. They won 23 seats out of the 57-seat Congress, but the figure will be insufficient to be able to promote projects, for which at least 29 legislators are required. No party won a solid majority and the remaining seats are divided between several parties: PAC 11, ML 10, PUSC 6, PASE 4, FA 1, PRC 1, PRN 1. This situation will force Chinchilla to demonstrate her abilities to negotiate and find consensus.

Laura Chinchilla was born on March 28, 1959 in San Jose, Costa Rica, the daughter of Rafael Angel Chinchilla Fallas, Comptroller General of the Republic during two administrations (1972-1987) and Emilce Miranda Castillo. Since 2000 she has been married to Jose Maria Rico Cueto and they have a son, José María Rico Chinchilla.

Laura Chinchilla falls somewhere around the center or center-right on the political spectrum, and was groomed within the social democratic tradition of the National Liberation Party (PLN). She's like the Democrats' Clinton or Labour's Blair, explained Constantino Urcuyo, a leading Costa Rican political analyst and professor at University of Costa Rica. In other words, she can reach out to both sides of the aisle if she needs to.

Chinchilla's mind matured in left-wing college halls at a time when Costa Rica's neighbors were crumbling into civil war. During her years in the early 1980s at the University of Costa Rica, Chinchilla wore clothes with indigenous patterns and colors common to the university's leftist student body, recalled Urcuyo, with whom she studied and later worked as a professor's assistant. "She was a very good student who was really concerned about (the world's) problems and had a restless intellect."

Chinchilla went on to obtain her master's in public policy at Georgetown University, where she engaged in "heated debates" with the late Jeane Kirkpatrick, said a fellow classmate, Jaime Alvarez. Famous for the staunch anti-communist "Kirkpatrick Doctrine," the professor had been an adviser to President Ronald Reagan and served as the first female U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. Her approach to Central America irked Chinchilla.

Alvarez 50, an adviser at the World Bank in Washington, D.C., said Georgetown was wowed by her intellect. "She's a lightning rod."

In the Costa Rica Legislature, she has worked in areas of judicial reform, public safety (police, drug trafficking, organized crime, etc.) Political and institutional reform (reform of the state and electoral reform), trade, technology, and children and youth programs.

First Vice President of the Republic of Costa Rica and Minister of Justice in the administration of Oscar Arias Sánchez (2006-2010). Although she left office on October 8, 2008, to pursue further her political career and created the Laura Chinchilla campaign for the presidency of Costa Rica.

Since 1990 she has worked as a consultant in Latin America and Africa for various international agencies in the area of institutional reform, with special emphasis on judicial reform and public security reform. Some consultancy led her to conduct assessments of the justice sector for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the coordination of studies and projects on judicial reform for the United Nations Program for Development (UNDP) and assessments and advice on police reform to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).