

Argentine leader gives rare TV interview

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BUENOS AIRES, Argentina --

President Nestor Kirchner, credited with leading Argentina out of an economic meltdown after his 2003 election, said Wednesday in a rare television interview that his president-elect wife would have a "much better" administration than his.

Speaking on the Todo Noticias network, Kirchner said he looked forward to handing the presidential sash to wife Cristina Fernandez, who won October's presidential election, when she starts her own four-year term on Monday as Argentina's first elected woman leader.

He told two Argentine journalists that he would not interfere with his wife's decision-making.

"The government that is coming is going to be much better than the one that's now leaving," he said as his wife prepared to be sworn in Monday.

Fernandez easily beat a divided opposition last Oct. 28, after campaigning on her husband's record of leading the nation out of deep economic crisis.

Kirchner's popularity after four straight years of 8 percent-plus growth rates was largely credited for her victory at the polls, though she waged a fast-paced campaign, meeting world leaders abroad while her husband helped woo votes back home.

Asked whether he would seek to influence his wife's administration, Kirchner declared: "It would be very bad for me to interfere in the job of the next government no matter what issue arises."

"She knows what she has to do," he said.

Kirchner said that while robust recovery has followed the 2001-2002 crisis, when Argentina was rocked by a steep devaluation and a \$100 billion debt default, he expected she would move ahead on plans for "sustainable recovery."

"Hard tasks await Cristina," he said. He noted the jobless rate is still stubbornly close to 10 percent and poverty still afflicts about a quarter of the 39 million population. Inflation is also creeping up.