



**Voices from waters 2008
International Film Festival, Bangalooru
13 – 18 September 2008**

Statement from Bharti Patel, Director Svaraj
Inauguated by Shekhar Kapur – Director/Producer
At Jnana Jyothi Auditorium, central college campus
Palace Road, Bangalore- 1

Namaskaara

Respected friends on the dais. And a very warm welcome to you all.

Svaraj is honoured to have been given this opportunity to support the 3rd international film festival in Bengaluru. It is indeed an honour to be here this evening at the launch of the festival amongst such distinguished guests from the art, the academic and the NGO fraternity.

Svaraj is a national voluntary organization based in Bengaluru with a vision for a just society in a just environment.

Although Svaraj is a new entrant in the field of water and development, Svaraj has been working on environmental disasters since 1975. From earthquakes to droughts, from floods to famine affecting regions from south to North, East to West, Svaraj has played a crucial role in responding to community rehabilitation and development needs as well as challenging the causes of environmental disasters in our country.

Since, the last five years we have been working in partnership with communities and community based organizations across India, where thousands of communities have already taken direct action to protect and to rebuild structures to conserve water and where thousands of farmers have converted to natural farming practices (the forgotten traditional practices) optimizing on water and land use for food security.

Our learning from our work has been very clear – Water is crucial not just for the development of our country, for agriculture and for our daily use. But also for sustaining the environment - the ecosystem – so that it can continue to provide us and future generations with safe water, food and livelihood.

Although this festival will not have the glitz of Bollywood, (of course Shekhar ji's presence with us here today indeed gives us the glitz we need). What this International film festival has is the sparkle of water. But sadly this precious sparkling element is rapidly being tarnished by our very own lack of responsibility.

India is one of the very few countries in the world which recognized the need to protect our environment. Our Constitution fathers and the freedom fighters were very clear on this. The Indian Constitution is among the few in the world that contains provision for environment protection. It explicitly stipulates the conservation, protection and improvement of the environment. *Article 51– imposes responsibility on every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment including forest, rivers, lakes tanks wild life, and to have compassion for living creatures*

Sixty years later - Many of our rivers are dry, and water polluted; Our forests barren and our earth deprived of valuable nutrients.

Climate change is a growing challenge. Already 2 billion people are affected by water shortages in 40 countries, and predictions are that by 2050 at least 1 in 4 people will live in countries affected by recurring shortages of freshwater.

In many areas competition over water at a local level is increasing, threatening livelihoods and food security, with the poorest most vulnerable to these changes.

- One in four of India's population is at risk of losing their livelihoods because of climate change.
- 700 million of our rural population is directly dependent on climate sensitive sectors such as Agriculture, Forests and fisheries and natural resources (water, biodiversity, mangroves, coastal Zones, and grasslands) for their subsistence and livelihoods.
- 1.5 million Children die each year in India from water borne disease.

In the longer term, the double challenge of climate change and, on the other hand, water scarcity – or floods - will increasingly become the central challenge that frames development in many places.

Experts are warning us of the grave impact of climate change on the natural ecosystems as well as socio-economic systems

The human community across the globe is faced with a huge challenge – and it's a challenge for all of us - governments, the corporate sector, the Public sector and citizens as well as the NGO community - and we need to ask - where we can do more and where more is possible.

Traditionally Indians have great respect for nature where water plants and soil are treated as sacred, valuing their properties that give us all life and livelihood. But increasingly these sacred elements are under great threat.

The over extraction of water, pollution and other physical abuse, has already resulted in the:

- unavailability of safe drinking water,
- the destruction of natural eco system and
- humanity's ability to feed itself

In *Voices from the waters 2008*, the films, the exhibition, paintings and the seminars provide Bangaloreans an excellent opportunity to see, to learn and to debate on water and its true meaning and the real value of water - be it political, economic, social, culture as well as environmental.

But most of all, I hope the films will help us make considered and the right choices on our use of water, our priorities, as well our responsibilities to conserve and share equitably our nations true heritage - water

I am sure you will be struck as I was, by the sheer diversity of films on water from across the world exhibiting the passion and commitment of the people who work on water and are affected by the lack of it or by too much water. Audience will have a great choice of films which will enrich, engage and enthrall them.

From the droughts affecting agriculture to the Bihar floods taking lives of lakhs of our people, questions are already being raised on what is going wrong, who is responsible, what we need to do and what we can do.

The movies selected from across the world attempt to give some explanations. The rest is up to all of us.

I wish this festival a great success and welcome the opportunity to interact with many of you during the week. I invite you all today to become friends of Svaraj and join thousands of other friends committed to our values on water and environment.

You can learn more about Svaraj by visiting our stall at this festival. My colleagues Rini and Samira will be happy to explain.

Thank you very much for giving me this time. And I wish you a great evening.

Bharti Patel
Director