



Svaraj Director's Vote of Thanks at Seminar on Ganga

Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh

March 4-5, 2006

Members of Parliament, Friends:

I am sure you will join me in thanking Rahul Barua, secretary general, SAF and the staff for organizing this very timely and important seminar on Ganga and to Sankat Mochan Foundation (SMF) for providing this a perfect site to discuss this critical concern.

Svaraj, an international voluntary organization, is proud to be associated with this seminar on Ganga and with SMF in their mission to clean the Ganga and share with us their long term solution to pollution in this river.

I first met Mahantji, Dr Veer Bhadra Mishra of SMF, eight months ago when I came to Varanasi with great apprehension about a river that not only provides livelihood to 500 million people in India but one that is in the minds of billions across the globe - cutting across all boundaries of class, creed, cast and religion.

Listening to Mahantji speak so passionately about mother Ganga and its current situation I knew then that Svaraj should be part of this mission to clean the river.

For a long time Svaraj's efforts (as Oxfam India) have focused on responding to relief and rehabilitation needs of people following disasters – floods, cyclones, droughts, and earthquakes which devastate peoples lives.

The focus now for Svaraj - **Society of Voluntary Action, Revitalization and Justice** - is on sustainable development in India, - designed with the people of India for the people of India, using appropriate technology, and to be managed locally by strengthened, local governing bodies.

It is with this in mind that we joined hands with SMF in their mission to clean the Ganga.

When there is disaster in India or any other place in the world, many of us respond immediately – not only in giving generously, but also in debating and asking why it happened, who to blame and how can it be prevented in future. Millions of people want to show they care.

Well here is a disaster that is happening before our very eyes which is being ignored by the very same millions.

These manmade disasters –

- The daily Pollution of our rivers and water bodies
- Our own irresponsible habits
- The over exploitation of natural resources in the name of economic progress and prosperity

After listening to Mahantji and his team, there should be no doubt in anyone's mind here today that what is happening in Ganga is one such disaster. It cannot be described as anything less

than a disaster - where the faecal coliform count (major cause of all water borne disease) runs into 10's of lakhs – 4000 times above the permissible level.

So as with any other disaster we **should** respond to it immediately

Just because one does **not** see the horror pictures on their TV sets at home or read about it in the papers, what is happening daily in the Ganga is a disaster and action is needed to stop it and prevent further deterioration of this sacred body.

***Much** of it is documented – a lot in the foreign press and media*

***Some** of it has been debated*

*But **very little** action is being taken to avoid this disaster.*

There is a solution which is well designed with people in mind and with the due respect for Mother Ganga - taking into account India's natural environment, its tradition and using appropriate modern technology.

All we ask is to give this solution a serious consideration.

I thank you all for accepting Rahul Barua's invitation to attend this seminar, giving up your valuable time to discuss with us a plan of action for Ganga that will give us the solution that is needed and is needed now.

On behalf of Svaraj, I join Mahantji and SMF in their plea to you as decision makers in our legislative bodies, to please help us take this forward or else the Mother Ganga will be no more.

Once again, thank you all and hope to work more closely with you.

Bharti Patel
Director, Svaraj