

## YES, IT'S WORTH IT

### ANIL NAIDOO REFLECTS ON A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF THE WATER JUSTICE MOVEMENT

by Anil Naidoo

**T**he fight for water justice is often difficult. I have been with the Council of Canadians' Blue Planet Project for the past five years, and I can tell you that it helps to be an optimist.

There is no denying that a global water crisis is underway. Around the world, over 1.2 billion people do not have access to clean drinking water, and this number is rising. Another 4 billion lack adequate sanitation services. In some parts of the global south, children die at the rate of one every 15 seconds due to easily preventable water-related diseases.

It is easy to wonder if our actions only represent insignificant victories that will be inevitably washed away by the flood of greed and misery that water privatization and commodification brings.

Then you live through a year like 2007 and anything seems possible. This past year was a fantastic one for the Blue Planet Project, for the water justice movement as a whole, and for me personally as an activist. We are reaching higher, striking further and having an impact we could never have dreamed of before. Could 2008 be the year when the balance finally tips in favour of the right to water?

#### MULTIPLE VICTORIES

Much of the momentum we see began in earnest during the 4th World Water Forum in Mexico City in March 2006. It was there that we worked with dozens of local and international groups to get almost 40,000 people into the streets to march for the right to water and against the privatization agenda of the World Water Forum.



Christina Riley

Anil Naidoo

This helped propel us into 2007, an extraordinary year filled with victories. We began in January, witnessing the launch of the African Water Network in Nairobi during the World Social Forum, representing 37 countries.

As always, National Chairperson Maude Barlow was tireless in her advocacy for water rights, launching her book *Blue Covenant: The Global Water Crisis and the Coming Battle for the Right to Water*. Maude toured more than 20 Canadian cities to spread the word about the need for a binding UN treaty on the right to water, as well as national policies that ban privatization and bulk exports. She also took her message to Australia, where she criticized former prime minister John Howard on his terrible water policy, as well as the European Parliament.

In 2007, the Council of Canadians was asked to advise Madame Louise Arbour, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, about the issue of water as a human right. Her final report, which was presented to the Human

Rights Council in September, demanded that national governments ensure effective monitoring of water rights violations through a system of penalties. In 2008, the Blue Planet Project will continue to call for an immediate halt to new water privatization initiatives, and a review of all existing forms of privatization.

Activists in 36 countries around the world spent the month of October fighting for the right to water. Once again, the Blue Planet Project was one of the key organizers of Blue October, which saw community activists organizing a variety of events to raise the profile of water as a public good. In Ghana, activists organized community meetings to fight water tariff increases. In Norway, Members of Parliament carried 15 litres of water on their heads, to demonstrate the appalling lack of access to water in the global south. In Colombia, civil society groups collected signatures calling for a national referendum that could enshrine the right to water in the country's constitution.

Working with dedicated partners from Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America, the Blue Planet Project strives to support the energy of social movements and civil society organizations around the world.

In 2008, we will continue to agitate when it is needed, and we will not let down the truly brave water warriors who struggle in communities where opposition to corporate control puts citizens in grave danger. We will continue to work with progressive governments, the UN and grassroots water activists, to put forth sustainable solutions to the world water crisis.

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Anil Naidoo is the Project Organizer for the Council of Canadians' Blue Planet Project.