

## DISPATCHES FROM THE GLOBAL WATER WAR

by Anil Naidoo

*Anil Naidoo recently returned from the World Social Forum in Nairobi, Kenya, which he attended with Council board members Maude Barlow, Leo Broderick and Chief Garry John. Here are some of his observations "from the ground" about the global fight to protect and guarantee access to public water.*

**G**lobally the fight for recognition of the right to water is well engaged. There is even a clear ground war underway over the issue of defining what the words actually mean. More than semantics are at stake.

For years, the big water companies insisted that water is a human need, and therefore not an inherent right. Now they have adopted the language of the water justice movement and are declaring that water is a human right. But they are trying to control and narrow the meaning so they can continue their relentless pursuit of profit. We are working to ensure they won't succeed.



**Chief Garry John, Maude Barlow, Art Manuel and Anil Naidoo, at the World Social Forum in Nairobi in January, where a new African Water Network was launched with much celebration.**

Canadians, despite the position that our government has taken against the right to water, are taking a lead in the global fight for water justice. Maude Barlow, the Council of Canadians' national chairperson, has had particular success in working with the governments of Norway and Bolivia. Thanks to a historic meeting between Barlow and the governments of the two countries in August, new international partnerships have solidified, which will help further the fight for water as a right.

In Latin America, our partners are ramping up the campaign for a South American Convention on the Right to Water. The Blue Planet Project strongly supports this initiative. We recently worked with Bolivian activists to place a full-page ad in the Bolivian paper *Los Tiempos*, calling for the South American Convention. In only three days, we were able to gather signatures from over 300 organizations in almost 50 countries. This statement was presented to the leaders of all of the South American countries, and the idea of a convention is continuing to be discussed and moved forward by some powerful country allies such as Ecuador, Uruguay, Venezuela and even Brazil.

Water is part of the commons, a public trust to be managed by communities on behalf of nature, all life and all generations to come. A respectful relationship with water can be a source of hope, but continued abuse of water will be our greatest challenge.

**Anil Naidoo is the Project Organizer for the Blue Planet Project.**

### WATER ACTIVISTS LAUNCH AFRICAN WATER NETWORK AT WORLD SOCIAL FORUM

Despite the disastrous record of failed water privatization schemes in Africa, international aid donors and governments continue to promote "private sector participation" and commercialization as the solution to Africa's water crisis. On January 24, 2007, representatives from civil society groups and social movements announced the launch of a new African Water Network to counter this misguided push for water privatization.

Over 250 activists representing African organizations and social movements, from over 40 African countries, committed to actively supporting this network during a historic session at the 7th World Social Forum in Nairobi.

"The launch of this network should put the water privateers, governments and international financial institutions on notice that Africans will resist privatization," said Ghanaian activist

Al-hassan Adam. In a strong statement, the network outlined five non-negotiable principles that this network will promote:

1. To fight against water privatization in all its forms
2. To ensure participatory public control and management of water resources
3. To oppose all forms of prepaid water meters
4. To ensure that water is enshrined in African countries' national constitutions as a human right
5. To ensure that the provision of water is a national project solely in the public domain

"Today we celebrate the birth of this network to resist the theft of our water, tomorrow we will celebrate access to clean water for all!" said Virginia Setshedi of the South African Coalition Against Water Privatization.