

Welcome Speech by Rakesh Kapoor, Managing Trustee, Alternative Futures, on the occasion of the Ganga Ballet, 13 September, 2014

Dear friends,

I am delighted to welcome you all this evening.

The Ganga is a national treasure and the importance of the work of the National Mission for Clean Ganga cannot be over-stated. We are very thankful to the National Mission for Clean Ganga for giving us this opportunity to bring to you this ballet on the Ganga.

Before I give the stage to the artists today – Odissi dancer Sharmila Ganguly Bhartari, Padma Shri Tom Alter and their team – I want to say **a few words about Alternative Futures and our approach**. Through research, policy advocacy and training, we believe in the power of knowledge for change. **What better way to illustrate our approach than through the river Ganga itself?**

The alternative future that we want to create – for Indian and for the world – is built on four principles: ecological sustainability, social justice, cultural pluralism and spirituality.

Can we imagine a future for Indian without the Ganga? No! The very first principle of the alternative future that we foresee is **ecological sustainability**. As you are probably aware, the water of river Ganga has a special quality. It is common knowledge that Ganga water does not putrefy, even after long periods of storage. Thus water from the Ganges has for millennia been regarded as incorruptible. According to a research conducted by a senior scientist of Lucknow-based National Botanical Research Institute (NBRI), a CSIR laboratory, Dr Chandrashekhar Nautiyal, the Ganga waters have 'anti-bacterial qualities'. The Ganga is connected so centrally with the life and the culture of India that we have no option but to keep it flowing, healthy and sustainable for India's future generations.

The second principle of the alternative future that we foresee is **social justice**. The Ganga supports one and all without discrimination – the rich and the poor, the industrialist and the farmer, the city-dweller and the villager. We cannot imagine the future India with polarization between the rich and the poor. The Ganga teaches us to treat all equally.

The third principle that should shape the future is **cultural pluralism**. Please note the 's' in Alternative Futures. The Ganga supports not only one and all, it support all kinds of communities and lifestyles. Today, in the global environment of conflict and violence, it is extremely important to respect different cultures, identities and approaches, in order to live in harmony. At another level, it is very important to respect the work that each

one of us is doing and to work together. The creation of this ballet itself, is the product of bringing together the public and the private, the government and the civil society, the old and the young.

Lastly, the final principle shaping the alternative future we foresee is **spirituality**. The Ganga is not only a sacred river for the Hindus, it connects to each one of us in deep, complex and even mysterious ways. This, to us, is spirituality. The unseen bond that connects us all. It is the bond that connects you, me and every other human being, irrespective of religion, nationality, identity and wealth. When we understand this unseen bond, then conflict vanishes and there is only a beautiful unity of purpose and existence.

This is the message that we wish to bring to you today through the Ganga Ballet. I welcome all you again to this evening.