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## Film examines growing conflict over water

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

In the small hours of Jan. 12, 2006, Academy Award-winning British filmmaker Joan Root was murdered as she lay asleep in her Kenyan home, apparently because of her efforts to protect a local lake from being overused to grow roses for export to Europe. A few years earlier, far away in pastoral New Haven, Wis., a group of middle-aged residents formed a grassroots group to stop the French bottled-water giant Perrier from gaining access to the town's local spring.

The common denominator to the two tales is the growing conflict over water. A powerful new documentary, *Blue Gold: World Water Wars*, shows that this basic resource may be in more peril than most people imagine.

The doc follows the water crisis from Winter Park, Fla., where massive sinkholes have formed as groundwater dries up, to Malaysia, where anyone who contaminates water faces the death penalty, to the Paraguay-Bolivia border, which some now call the Middle East of water because of the violent clashes with police there over water ownership.

The film is based on the book *Blue Gold: The Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World's Water*, co-written by Maude Barlow, national chair of the Council of Canadians citizen's advocacy group, and Tony Clarke, a long-time Canadian activist against free trade.

The film *Blue Gold* sounds the same sweeping alarms as Al Gore's documentary on global warming, *An Inconvenient Truth*, but about our endangered water supply – and the implications are just as grim.

Fresh from its world premiere at the Vancouver International Film Festival, where it picked up an audience award, *Blue Gold* will be shown in Toronto at tonight's opening gala of the ninth annual Planet in Focus International Environmental Film and Video Festival.

Fittingly, it will be presented alongside the fest's industry/media eco-hero award, set to go to Canadian photographer Edward Burtynsky, who has long aimed his artistic lens at the abuse of our natural resources.

"*Blue Gold* deals with a topic dear to every Canadian. Water is the most precious resource we have," says the festival's artistic director, Candida Paltiel.

The Canadian showings aren't the only Canuck connections for this American doc.

California director Sam Bozzo says he was partly inspired by his hero Mark Achbar, the Canadian director of 2003's *The Corporation*. Achbar returned the love by acting as co-executive producer of Bozzo's film and helping him secure Canadian distribution.

Barlow is the closest thing to being *Blue Gold's* Gore, appearing throughout the film as a guide. She hopes the film, narrated by British actor Malcolm McDowell, will ignite larger audiences.

"You can put down facts and figures in a book and they can come alive in an emotional way in a film," she says. (Barlow subsequently penned a second book on the water crisis, *Blue Covenant: The Global Water Crisis and the Coming Battle for the Right to Water*.)

Much of *Blue Gold's* litany of information may come as a shock. The world collectively pumps 30 billion gallons of groundwater every day – 15 times more water than can safely be replenished by rainfall. As water becomes scarce, companies like Nestlé and Coca-Cola have made aggressive moves to buy local supplies, leading to the situation in many parts of Africa, where rivers are polluted and locals must either pay exorbitant fees for tap water or purchase bottled Dasani. Barlow says the problem is growing in Canada, too. She faults our "myth of abundance" for overuse of the Great Lakes and the destruction of the water table in northern Alberta to mine the tar sands.

She also warns that other countries will turn to our precious lakes when their own water runs dry.

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