

PRESS RELEASE

Film Actor Abhay Deol becomes Ambassador for Video Volunteers, to visit a Community Video Unit in Mumbai slums on Saturday, Jan 23

Mumbai, Jan 21, 2010: Popular film actor Abhay Deol today announced that he would be an Ambassador with the organization Video Volunteers and the cause of community media. The announcement will be made when the actor will visit Community Video Units set up by Video Volunteers and the NGOs Akshara and Yuva in a Chembur slum and attend a screening of videos made by the community. The actor will be accompanied by renowned film directors Imtiyaz Ali and Dibakar Banerjee. All press are invited to attend.

Says Deol, "Video Volunteers has created a movement based on the idea that the poor in India have a right to a voice and to express themselves creatively. As a creative artist myself and someone committed to alternative cinema, I find it tremendously exciting that, thanks to Video Volunteers, so many communities around India are able to use my chosen medium of expression to make life better in their communities."

Video Volunteers, an organization dedicated to create an alternative media at the grass root level, has been training rural and slum communities since 2003 to create their own "Community Video Units" in partnership with different NGOs. Presently there are more than 100 people working full time around the country as Community Video Producers. These Community Video Producers make films on topics like health, water, sanitation and human rights that are shown in community settings, on widescreen projectors during evening screenings just like the one Mr. Deol will attend Saturday.

Explained the director of Video Volunteers, documentary filmmaker and human rights activist Stalin K., "All of the films that our Community Video Producers make are action-oriented and each give solutions to the problem. Because of these films, we've had amazing successes which include thousands of people in rural Gujarat getting clean water, electricity, medical care and so on. In fact right here in Mumbai, the Community Video Producers have some notable successes.

For instance, one film by Yuva played a role in the struggle against the privatization of water here in Mumbai; another led the municipal authorities to put out more garbage bins in the slums; and one film on sexual harassment by our partner Akshara was instrumental in creating the phone helpline 103. The support of Mr. Deol to Video Volunteers and its work will definitely strengthen the alternative media movement we are trying to build and help empower more communities to find their voice”.

Video Volunteers and Abhay Deol believe that every village in India can and should have at least one person trained to report on that community’s local issues. “This is the potential of the digital revolution, the poor in India can finally make their voices heard to the mainstream media and to government,” says Mr. Deol. “And in a place like India, with high levels of illiteracy, video and film are a perfect medium. Giving people the tools to make their own media is a great way to enable more people to participate in our democracy. In fact, my latest film Road also projects cinema as a powerful medium to communicate. In the film I play the role of a person who is on the move and shows films to people at various places and along the way rediscovers life and himself. I feel there is a strong parallel between the film and the work of Video Volunteers. By getting involved in Video Volunteers, I plan to help the organization reach its stated goal of having several hundred community producers around India – enough that we are able to see community media on our TVs at night, and where we can really see that the poor are speaking on their own, not just being spoken for.”

Event Details for Press Interested in Attending:

Location: Panchashil Nagar, Nagsen Bouddha Vihar, Near Sahakar Cinema, Opp. Tilaknagar Municipal Market, Amar Mahal, Chembur, Mumbai 89.

Time: 7:30-9pm, Saturday, Jan 23rd

Program: Community Video Producers will show six short clips of their films outdoors in the slum setting on a widescreen projector. Abhay Deol will address the slum dwellers community after the screening.

For more information, please contact:

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Notes to the Editor:

1. Abhay Deol (born in 1976, India) is an Indian film actor. A graduate of Mumbai University, Abhay also studied Fine Arts in Los Angeles. Nephew of the famous actor Dharmendra, Abhay made his film debut in the 2005 film 'Socha Na Tha' and has since then, acted in over a dozen films, including the critically acclaimed Road, Dev and also big box office success like 'Oye Lucky! 'Lucky Oye! Known as a 'thinking actor', the young actor's main area of interests are acting, painting, philosophy and journalism. His latest film, 'Road' which has received great reviews at recent Toronto Film Festival, is now ready to be released in India www.roadmoviethefilm.com
2. Video Volunteers has trained over 100 people who currently work full time around the country as community video producers in its various Community Video Units. These are former diamond polishers, rickshaw drivers, and farm laborers, yet today they are the voice of their communities. <http://www.videovolunteers.org/>
3. In Mumbai, there are currently two Community Video Units that have jointly had over 500 screenings in bastis around the city, and films by both of these Community Video Units will be shown on Saturday. Hamari Awaaz is set up by the Yuva, a NGO that works for the rights of slum dwellers, and works in Dharavi, Ghatkopar and Chembur areas of Mumbai. Apna TV is set up by the leading women's organization Akshara. www.yuva.org www.aksharacentre.org.
4. Video Volunteers is launching a nationwide Community Journalism program called Vividh where it will train 60 men and women as Community Journalists and build a media network at the grassroots level.
<http://www.videovolunteers.org/community-journalism-program-our-new-initiative/>