

AFTERIMAGE PUBLIC MEDIA, ITVS and ACTUAL FILMS
in association with IMPACT PARTNERS
present

THE ISLAND PRESIDENT

FROM THE FILMMAKERS OF
THE RAPE OF EUROPA AND LOST BOYS OF SUDAN

DIRECTED BY JON SHENK
PRODUCED BY RICHARD BERGE AND BONNI COHEN

2011 TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL SCREENING SCHEDULE

MONDAY AUG 29 – 1:00 PM – BELL LIGHTBOX CINEMA 4 – ADVANCE PRESS
SATURDAY SEPT 10 – 10:45 AM – BELL LIGHTBOX CINEMA 3 – PRESS & INDUSTRY
SATURDAY SEPT 10 – 6:30 PM – BELL LIGHTBOX CINEMA 2 – WORLD
PREMIERE
WEDNESDAY SEPT 14 – 9:00 AM – SCOTIABANK THEATRE 9 – PRESS & INDUSTRY

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PRESS MATERIALS AVAILABLE ONLINE AT WWW.THEISLANDPRESIDENT.COM

THE ISLAND PRESIDENT

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Jon Shenk's *The Island President* tells the story of President Mohamed Nasheed of the Maldives, a man confronting a problem greater than any other world leader has ever faced—the literal survival of his country and everyone in it. After bringing democracy to the Maldives after thirty years of despotic rule, Nasheed is now faced with an even greater challenge: as one of the most low-lying countries in the world, a rise of three feet in sea level would submerge the 1200 islands of the Maldives enough to make them uninhabitable.

The Island President captures Nasheed's first year of office, culminating in his trip to the Copenhagen Climate Summit in 2009, where the film provides a rare glimpse of the political horse-trading that goes on at such a top-level global assembly. Nasheed is unusually candid about revealing his strategies—leveraging the Maldives' underdog position as a tiny country, harnessing the power of media, and overcoming deadlocks through an appeal to unity with other developing nations. When hope fades for a written accord to be signed, Nasheed makes a stirring speech which salvages an agreement. Despite the modest size of his country, Mohamed Nasheed has become one of the leading international voices for urgent action on climate change.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Jon Shenk's *The Island President* tells the story of President Mohamed Nasheed of the Maldives, a man confronting a problem greater than any other world leader has ever faced—the literal survival of his country and everyone in it.

After leading a twenty-year pro-democracy movement against the brutal regime of Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, surviving repeated imprisonments and torture, Nasheed became president at 41, only to encounter a far more implacable adversary than a dictator—the ocean. Considered the lowest lying country in the world, a rise of a mere three meters in sea level would inundate the Maldives, rendering the country practically unlivable. Unless dramatic changes are made by the larger countries of the world, the Maldives, like a modern Atlantis, will disappear under the waves.

As much as its plight is one-of-a-kind, the Maldives itself is a country like no other. A Shangri-la of breathtakingly beautiful turquoise reefs, beaches, and palm trees, the

Maldives is composed of 1200 coral islands off of the Indian sub-continent, of which 200 are inhabited. Arrayed across 400 miles of open sea like necklace-shaped constellations, the Maldives is one of the most geographically dispersed nations on earth.

Democracy came to the Maldives, a Sunni Muslim country, in 2008, in a way that was uncannily similar to the recent Middle Eastern populist revolts against autocrats in Tunisia, Egypt, and elsewhere. What made the Maldives movement different from the ones that have followed it is the existence of a clear opposition party, the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), which had in its co-founder Nasheed a popular and charismatic leader ready to usher his country into democracy. Educated in Sri Lanka and England, Nasheed proved to be an unusually shrewd and sophisticated politician who grasped that the only way he could stand up to the catastrophic issues of climate change facing his country would be to take the Maldives cause to the world stage.

The Island President captures Nasheed's first year of office, a time when he influences the direction of international events in a way that few leaders have ever done, even in countries many times the size of the Maldives. Nasheed's story culminates in his trip to the Copenhagen Climate Summit in 2009, where the film provides a rare glimpse of the political horse-trading that goes on at such a top-level global assembly. Nasheed is unusually candid about revealing his strategies—leveraging the Maldives' underdog position, harnessing the power of media, and overcoming deadlocks through an appeal to unity with other developing nations. Despite his country's dire situation, Nasheed remains cool, pragmatic and flexible, willing to compromise and try again another day. When all hope fades for any kind of written accord to be signed, Nasheed makes a stirring speech which salvages an agreement. While Copenhagen is judged by many as a failure, it marked the first time in history that China, India, and the United States agreed to reduce carbon emissions.

In this age of political consultants and talking points, it is almost unheard of nowadays for filmmakers to get the astonishing degree of access that director Jon Shenk and his filmmaking team secured from Nasheed in *The Island President*. An award-winning cinematographer as well as a director, Shenk suffuses *The Island President* with the unearthly beauty of the Maldives. Seen from the sky, set against the haunting music of Radiohead, the coral islands seem unreal, more like glowing iridescent creatures than

geographic areas. The parallel is apt, as the Maldives are as endangered as any species, and unless strong actions are taken, this magical country could become extinct.

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THE ISLAND PRESIDENT

CAST LIST, IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE



Mohamed “Anni” Nasheed
President of the Republic of Maldives



Ahmed Naseem
Minister of State for Foreign Affairs
(currently Minister of Foreign Affairs)



Mohamed Aslam
Minister of Housing and Environment



Aminath Shauna
Deputy Undersecretary, President's Office



Mohamed Zuhair
Press Secretary, President's Office



Laila Ali
Wife of President Mohamed Nasheed



Ahmed Moosa
President's Envoy for Science and
Technology



Paul Roberts

Advisor on International Media &
Communications, President's Office



Dr. Mohamed Waheed

Vice President of the Republic of Maldives



Mark Lynas

President's Advisor on Climate Change



Mohamed Ziyad

Executive Services Secretary, President's
Office



Dr. Ahmed Shaheed

Minister of Foreign Affairs
(currently UN Special Rapporteur on Iran)



Abdul Ghafoor Mohamed

Ambassador to the United Nations



Ibrahim Hussein Zaki

Special Envoy to the President



Iruthisham Adam

Ambassador to the UN Offices at Geneva

THE ISLAND PRESIDENT

ABOUT THE MALDIVES

- Situated in the Indian Ocean, 340 km (210 miles) southwest of India and stretching 750 km (450 miles) south past the Equator.
- An archipelago of approximately 1,200 coral islands, of which 200 are inhabited. The number rises to 2,000 when including all land forms like sandbanks and reefs that are exposed at low tide.
- Lowest country on earth: average elevation is 1.5 meters above sea level; highest point is 2.5 meters; 80% of the land is less than 1 meter above sea level.
- The low level of the Maldives makes it very sensitive to sea level rise, with some scientists fearing that it could be underwater by 2050 or 2100.
- 400 miles of coastline
- Population: nearly 400,000, a quarter of whom live in the capital island, Malé.
- A former British Protectorate that gained full independence in 1965. The Republic of Maldives has been led by three presidents since independence:
 - Amir Ibrahim Nasir (1968 – 1978)
 - Maumoon Abdul Gayoom (1978 – 2008)
 - Mohamed Nasheed (2008 – present)

THE ISLAND PRESIDENT

ABOUT MOHAMED NASHEED

- Born in 1967 to a merchant family in the capital island, Malé.
- Attended Dauntsey's School and Liverpool John Moore's University in the UK.
- January 1990: Arrested by Gayoom regime for publishing the political magazine, *Sangu*.
- November, 1990: Arrested and kept in solitary confinement for 18 months. His then-girlfriend Laila Ali also arrested and sentenced to 6 months of house arrest.
- 1991: Named a Prisoner of Conscience by Amnesty International.
- 1992: Held incommunicado for 14 months on the prison island of Gamaadhoo.
- 1996: Arrested again for political writings—detained for 3 months followed by house arrest.
- 1997: Nasheed and Laila's first daughter, Meera, is born.
- 1999: Wins election to the Maldivian parliament (the *Majlis*).
- 2001: Nasheed is arrested on false charges and loses his seat in parliament. While jailed in solitary confinement, Nasheed and Laila's second daughter, Zaya, is born.

Banished to Angolhitheem island (pop. 30) for 6 months, followed by 3 months of house arrest.

- 2003: Eevan Naseem is beaten to death during torture at the Maafushi prison. The incident sparks riots at the prison and in Malé. Nasheed leaves the country.

An exile in Sri Lanka, Nasheed co-founds the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), and party members lobby governments around the world for recognition.

- 2004: Granted political asylum in the UK.
- 2005: Returns to the Maldives to resume political activity at home, participating in a repeating cycle of peaceful demonstrations and arrests.

- 2008: Domestic and international pressure forces Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, the Maldives 30 year ruler, to hold the country's first multi-party presidential elections.

Nasheed wins the election and is sworn in as president on November 11, 2008.

- 2009: Pledges to make the Maldives the first country to go carbon neutral within a decade by moving to renewable energy sources (March, 2009)

Time magazine names Nasheed as one of its 2009 Heroes of the Environment (September, 2009).

Nasheed addresses world leaders at the UN Secretary General's Climate Summit in New York (September, 2009).

To dramatize the the threat that climate change poses to the Maldives, Nasheed dons SCUBA equipment and presides over the world's first underwater cabinet meeting (October, 2009).

Nasheed attends the Copenhagen Climate Conference (December, 2009).

- 2010: Nasheed awarded the Champions of the Earth Award, the United Nation's most prestigious environmental prize.

THE ISLAND PRESIDENT

THE FILMMAKERS

JON SHENK (DIRECTOR / CINEMATOGRAPHER)

Jon Shenk was the DP for the Academy Award-winning SMILE PINKI (2009). He won an Emmy for BLAME SOMEBODY ELSE (2007, PBS/Exposé). Shenk directed and photographed LOST BOYS OF SUDAN, Independent Spirit Award winner in 2004. He co-directed and photographed DEMOCRACY AFGHAN STYLE (2004). In 2005, he directed and photographed THE NEW HEROES. Early in his career, he directed and photographed THE BEGINNING (1999), a chronicle of George Lucas's Star Wars: Episode I. Shenk has produced and photographed dozens of documentaries for PBS, the BBC, A&E, Bravo, CBS, NBC, and National Geographic Television. He has been nominated twice for Emmys for his cinematography. He earned his Master's degree in Documentary Filmmaking from Stanford University in 1995 and his Bachelor's degree from Yale in 1991.

RICHARD BERGE (PRODUCER)

Richard Berge wrote, produced and directed THE RAPE OF EUROPA (2006) which was nominated for two Emmy Awards and for Best Documentary Screenplay by the Writers Guild of America. Working with director Barry Levinson, he wrote and produced YESTERDAY'S TOMORROWS (1999). He was the line producer for Jon Else's SING FASTER: THE STAGEHAND'S RING CYCLE (1999). He wrote and produced profiles of visual and performing artists for MAKE: TELEVISION (2008) and SPARK! (2003-04), two weekly series for public television. Before completing the Master's program in Documentary Filmmaking at Stanford University in 1994, Berge worked at the Santa Fe Opera in New Mexico and the Metropolitan Opera in New York. He received his Bachelor's degree from Stanford University in 1984.

BONNI COHEN (PRODUCER)

Bonni Cohen recently produced and directed INSIDE GUANTANAMO (2009) for National Geographic Television. She produced and directed THE RAPE OF EUROPA (2006), nominated for two Emmy Awards and Best Documentary Screenplay by the Writers Guild of America. With director Jon Else, she produced WONDERS ARE MANY (2006). Cohen co-produced DEMOCRACY AFGHAN STYLE (2004). In 2003, she produced and directed THE NEW HEROES. In 2001, Cohen produced and directed THE NOBEL: VISIONS OF OUR CENTURY (2001). She directed and produced KOFI ANNAN: EYE OF THE STORM (1999). She produced THEY DREW FIRE (1998). Her other works include THE HUMAN SEXES with Desmond Morris. She produced Jon Else's film, OPEN OUTCRY (2000). Before coming to documentary film, Cohen worked as a journalist for Reuters Television and NBC, based in London and Jerusalem. Cohen earned a Masters degree in Documentary Film from Stanford University in 1994 and Bachelor's degree in International Relations from Tufts University in 1987.

JON ELSE (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER)

Jon Else is an award-winning filmmaker who, for thirty years, has made prime-time documentaries for public television. His films include *THE DAY AFTER TRINITY: J. ROBERT OPPENHEIMER AND THE ATOMIC BOMB* (1981), *YOSEMITE: THE FATE OF HEAVEN* (1988), three films of the *CADILLAC DESERT* series (1997), *SING FASTER* (1998), and *OPEN OUTCRY* (2001). He worked closely with Henry Hampton at Blackside, Inc., where he served as series producer for *EYES ON THE PRIZE: AMERICA'S CIVIL RIGHTS YEARS* (1987) and as consulting producer on *THE GREAT DEPRESSION* (1993) and *AMERICA'S WAR ON POVERTY* (1995). His feature documentary *WONDERS ARE MANY: THE MAKING OF DOCTOR ATOMIC* premiered at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival. Else co-directed *GUANTANAMO* (2009) with Bonni Cohen for National Geographic Television, and he worked closely with Actual Films as editorial consultant on *THE RAPE OF EUROPA* (2006). Else is a Professor in the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California, Berkeley. He was a MacArthur Fellow and has won four National Emmys, several Alfred I. DuPont and Peabody awards, the Prix Italia, the Sundance Special Jury Prize and Sundance Filmmaker's Trophy, as well as several Academy Award Nominations.

PEDRO KOS (EDITOR)

Pedro Kos edited the Academy Award nominated documentary *WASTE LAND* directed by Lucy Walker. *WASTE LAND* has received numerous awards including the audience awards at both the 2010 Sundance Film Festival and the Berlin Film Festival. Kos has also frequently collaborated with Academy Award winner Freida Lee Mock, and Sundance winner Jessica Sanders both as an editor and as a second unit director. He was the editor and second unit director on Ms. Mock's *SING CHINA!* And previously he was the second unit director on Ms. Sanders new film *MARCH OF THE LIVING*. He began his career as an editor on the making-of documentary to Terrence Malick's *THE NEW WORLD*. Kos was born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and raised both there and in New York City and Miami, Florida. He received his Bachelor's degree in theater directing from Yale University.

THE ISLAND PRESIDENT

CREDITS

DIRECTED BY JON SHENK

PRODUCED BY RICHARD BERGE, BONNI COHEN

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER JON ELSE

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY JON SHENK

EDITED BY PEDRO KOS

SOUND RECORDIST LINCOLN ELSE

CO-EDITOR JOSH PETERSON

SOUND EDITOR JAMES LEBRECHT

MUSIC BY RADIOHEAD, STARS OF THE LID

ADDITIONAL MUSIC COMPOSED BY MARCO D'AMBROSIO

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER FOR ITVS SALLY JO FIFER

CO-EXECUTIVE PRODUCER DAN COGAN

THIS FILM WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY THE SUPPORT FROM

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 THE JOHN D. AND CATHERINE T. MACARTHUR FOUNDATION
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