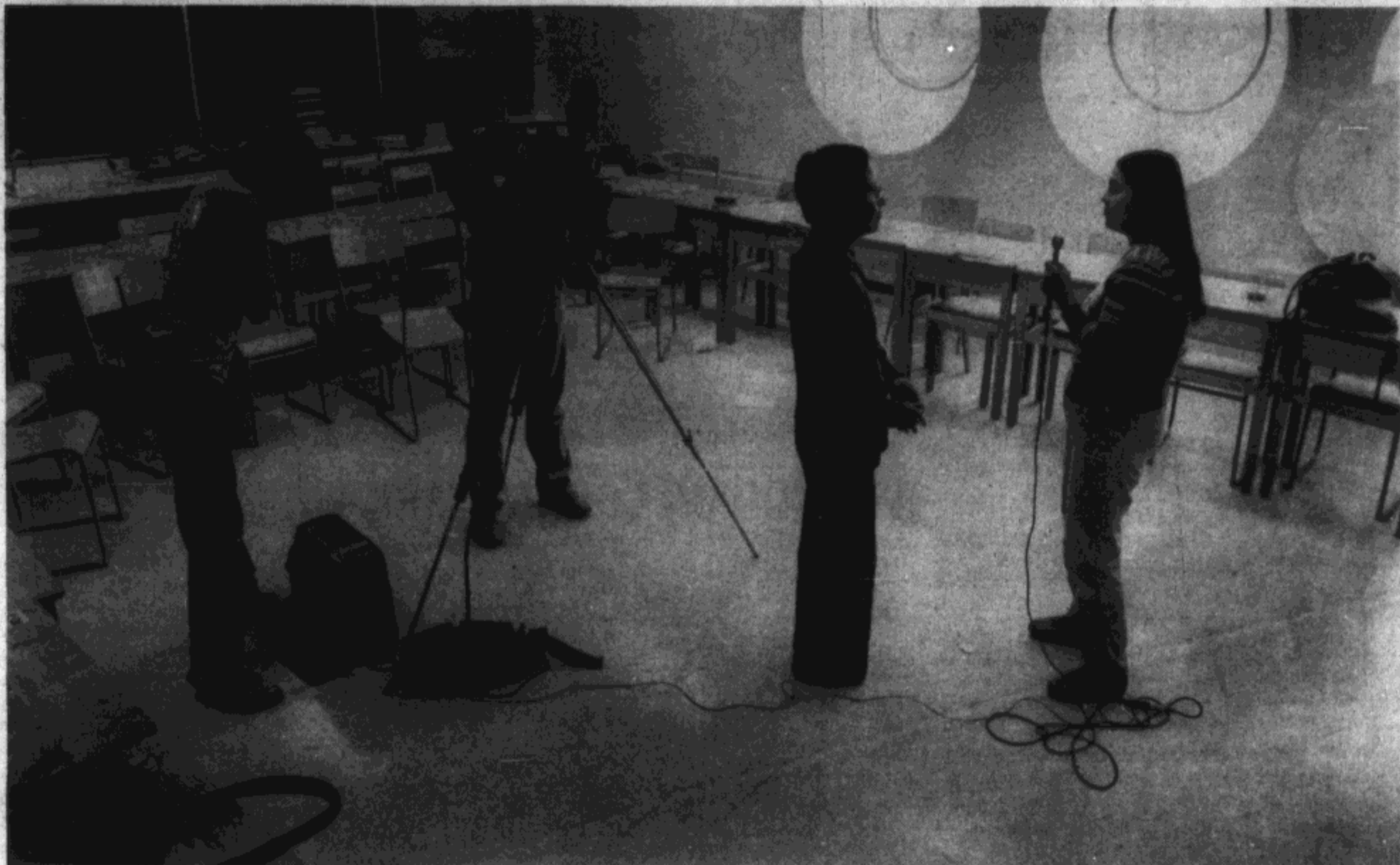


IBC greatly helps Arctic communication



Members of Canada's Inuit Broadcasting Corporation interview and tape a country woman pushing for the rights of Inuit women.

PHOTOS BY BILL HESS

By Bill Hess
Tundra Times

Roland Booth of Kotzebue retires to his hotel room after a busy day and turns on the TV. A "Barney Miller" rerun is on, but Booth has no interest in it. He flips the dial and finds nothing worth watching. Shortly, he tries again. This time, "Barney Miller" has been replaced by a rather simple news set.

There are no fancy visual aids, just a few different young Inuit broadcasters and journalists, speaking to the camera from in front of a deep blue background and conducting interviews at different locations. They use no English or other foreign language, but speak in their Inuktituk tongue.

Booth is fascinated. Although his own Inupiaq language differs from Inuktituk, the two are close enough to allow him to understand most of what goes on. He sits riveted, as they say, to the "tube." Only now he is seeing and hearing about issues impor-

tant to his people, discussed by representatives of those people from three nations.

Cultural events are mixed with the politics; singing, dancing, and story-telling.

"This is really great," Booth finally comments. "If we had something like this back home, the people would really like it. Especially the old people who use Inupiaq all the time. There's hardly anything for them to watch now."

That scene took place over one month ago as Booth participated at the Inuit Circumpolar Conference in Frobisher Bay, the Northwest Territories. What Booth was watching was the nightly news programming of the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation, which is broadcast to villages even more remote than most Alaska's which are spread across Northern Canada.

A few years ago, such a service was hard to even imagine in this vast, most sparsely populated patch of North America. "In the early 70's, we realized that the world

around us was building up," Josepi Padlayat, president of IBC, explains the circumstances which eventually led to the founding of the television network.

"It was approaching us very rapidly, but we had no control over anything that affected our lifestyle. Nevertheless, it was coming anyway, whether we were part of it or not." Such things included great hydro-power dams, future oil and mineral development, possible nuclear plants, and social changes being brought in by the Canadian government with big impacts on the subsistence lifestyle.

"We realized we needed to have information about these things going to the people," Padlayat says. "And second, we realized that communications amongst ourselves should improve as well, because at that time, there were no adequate communications networks in our communities."

The problems in setting up such a network could have seemed insurmountable. Anyone who has ever been impressed with the vastness of Alaska and the difficulties of linking the state's many roadless villages together need only to consider that Canada's Northwest Territories alone covers twice the area of Alaska, has a population smaller than that of the city of Fairbanks, and is virtually devoid of roads.

Even air travel is more difficult and expensive than in Alaska.

In 1973, Padlayat was called on by the Northern Quebec Inuit Association of Canada, which later became the Mako-

vik Corp. after a regional land claims settlement with the Canadian Government, to take a close look at Inuit communication needs. He led a crew of three to villages throughout Northern Quebec.

The Canadian government looked at the results and funded a new, Inuit communications organization called Taqramiut Nipingat, Inc. That organization is still involved with producing documentaries and programs for television and radio.

Local communications programs were set up as well, where villagers run their own FM radio stations. "The FM stations are quite unique," says Padlayat. "They are used by the communities as tool to inform their neighbors what's going on. Maybe a mother would phone in and have the radio station broadcast a message to her daughter to come home right away, and go to bed, because she has to go to school the next day."

The people of the villages were also helped to set themselves up with high-frequency radios, which are much more powerful and reliable than CB radios. Also much more expensive. For-profit dealers sell the radios for about \$4,000, Padlayat noted. As a non-profit entity, TNI was able to provide the radios at a cost to the villagers of only \$2,000.

Padlayat credits the use of the radios for the saving of many lives when emergencies have arisen on hunting, trapping and fishing trips.

Because of his experience with TNI, Padlayat was called on to head the IBC when it was founded in 1981. While

TNI involves itself with documentaries and similar programs, IBC brings news programs to 32 Inuit villages in Labrador, Northern Quebec, and the Northwest Territories.

The IBC is funded at an annual rate of \$2 million dollars by the Canadian government, out of a \$40 million federal program which helps both Inuit and Indians across Canada in running communications programs. The areas they live in are so great and their populations and economic resources so small that the people would be unable to support them by themselves.

According to Padlayat, IBC employs some 45 workers, and all but 10 are Inuit. All of the reporting and news broadcasting positions are held by Inuit. "They have to be," Padlayat points out. "Because it's all in the Inuktituk language. Most of the people in the villages do not speak anything else."

The non-Inuit serve mostly in training and resource positions. "We have Inuit involved in every aspect," Padlayat says proudly. "Reporting, handling equipment, scripting, managing... every aspect!"

One of the non-Inuit trainers notes that while some of the Inuit broadcasters might not yet be as polished and sophisticated in their performances as are the "big-city" newscasters, they are getting the news, from their people to their people in greater depth than it has ever been done before, and better.

"There may be some rough edges," he emphasizes, "but damn! It's good programming and it is all done by Inuit!"



IBC staff laugh as they run the tape of an interview in high speed.