

Alaskan Natives cling to promise of their land and won

the situation of Alaska Natives 14 years ago, when the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act was approved by the U.S. Congress. He said Alaska Natives were a people in "disarray." Their traditional values, customs, and practices had been held up as being unneeded and even harmful to future progress in 20th Century America."

He said the land was being taken. Natives had become "a minority in our own land and an unheeded minority in the development of public policy that was to replace that which was being stripped from us."

But, he said, Alaska Natives cling to a promise of their ancestors — that the land would provide and they would survive.

That philosophy said "we will not give up these lands. We will not squander the money. We will use both to secure economic power. And will use that economic power to secure our survival" as Native people as long as Native people shall live. And we will make ourselves beholden to no one but to our own people, in making the decisions for the future."

He explained that Native corporations are facing a difficult task of having to cope with today's reality while making a life tomorrow. That task is all the more difficult, said Mallott, because no one else has had a similar task before. There is no one for the Native corporation leaders to consult with.

"The corporations and the land were left to us to build, to shape, to make grow or to dispose of as we see fit. If we fail, we fail because we



Byron I. Mallott

Mallott told the group that such a vision is not inconceivable.

He also thanked the members of the tribes and the NCAI who stepped forward more than 10 years ago to lend support — financial and political — to Alaska Natives when they were fighting for land claims.

Naming the Yakimas, Navajos, Sioux, Makahs, Cheyenne, Arapaho, and many others, Mallott said "We learned from you — your history of victory and defeat, of treaties and trails of Texas, of land and the dispossessed; but more than anything else — of hope in the face of despair. Of continuing survival in the face

of a century and a half of attempted destruction. You have endured and this has inspired us and we are grateful."

Mallott said the tribes should now unite in finding a vision embodying Spirit, Sovereignty and Survival, a vision of how we will achieve our tomorrows.

failed ourselves. If we succeed, we succeed because we did it ourselves. Utilizing our own capabilities, our own strength, our own vision.

Mallott also talked of his vision for the Alaska of the future — a state where there is a shared challenge for Natives and others to maintain the natural resources for mutual benefit; a state where there exists "the desire among Alaskans to maintain and enhance racial and cultural diversity in a state, the social texture of which is profoundly influenced by the 20 percent of its population which is Alaska Native."

And, most of all, Mallott said he sees a state in which "the color of a person's skin is not a basis for discrimination but a reason for celebration. A society in which a culture is not destroyed but rather nurtured. A society in which differences in philosophy, religion, dance, and language are not reasons for separation but are the basis for admiration and mutual education.