

The Alaska Inter-Tribal Council

By Willie Kasayulie
Chairman
Special to the *Tundra Times*

The historic event occurring on the 10th of Dec., 59 days after the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Columbus, for 128 tribal government representatives to the signing of the Inter-Tribal Treaty and the Constitution creating the Alaska Inter-Tribal Council at Anchorage. The indigenous United Nations for Alaska's tribes.

Unlike the other statewide organizations, the AITC membership is restricted to the tribal governments organized traditionally or under the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA). Any village tribal government is eligible for membership by tribal resolution.

The Constitution developed a 24 member Executive Council from the 12 geographic areas with 2 representatives elected from each area based upon staggered terms. The AITC Chairman is elected annually during the convention of tribal governments.

The Executive Council has limited powers granted by the tribes through the adopted Constitution. The Constitution calls for quarterly meetings of the Executive Council to give direction to the Executive Director to carry forward the day-to-day operation of the Council.

Given the amount of criticism towards tribal authority from the State and certain federal agencies, the AITC has a tremendous responsibility for the accountability of the inherent rights of its tribal membership. Interpretation, dissemination and education of specific State and federal legislation impacting the ability of tribes to exercise self-determination on a village level is of paramount importance. The villages need to reawaken the



Willie Kasayulie. (File photo)

sleeping culture and reassume the age-old tradition our grandparents exercised using the Native and the modern technology afforded to us by the western society.

Today, we have many of our communities incorporated as municipal governments and boroughs. In a majority of the cases, the municipal governments have assumed governmental authority on village/regional levels over tribal government responsibilities. Again, in majority case, many of the local Natives sit on the Councils and Assemblies. These municipal governments play an important role to a certain extent.

The choice of the residents of Akiachak to dissolve its State chartered municipality was a collective effort successfully carried out by the village leaders to revitalize the tribal government to assume responsibility of governmental services and tribal authority on a village level.

In either case, the AITC must educate its membership on the pros and cons of tribal versus municipal government, at the same time respecting the collective decisions of the villages to govern themselves by their choice of government.

Aside from the limited powers granted to the Council, the AITC must be involved in the subsistence and cultural preservation, education, economic development and international indigenous issues affecting the ability of tribes to maintain the inherent authority

in our respective homelands.

On March 23 and 24, 1992, the Alaska Federation of Natives and RurAL CAP jointly sponsored the Subsistence Summit and adopted 12 Guiding Principles and a No Net Loss statement towards subsistence in Alaska.

Principle 10 of the Guiding Principles states... "The Native people of Alaska shall exercise their tribal sovereignty on all matters involving their inherent rights, including subsistence rights on lands and waters."

Because subsistence, sovereignty and cultural practices is guaranteed to all Alaska Natives no matter where one resides at within the State of Alaska.

AITC must establish a relationship with the Education Community on village, regional and statewide levels. After all, the new leadership will be forthcoming from our schools in the villages and need to be further educated in higher institutions within the State, national and international universities.

AITC must encourage the tribal governments to pursue the establishment of tribally controlled community colleges and insure the federal government maintain its trust responsibility of providing resources to educate individual tribal members of each Alaska Native tribe. At the request of the tribes, the federal government must assist them in establishing federally funded schools at the same time have access to State funds to provide quality education to all children.

Economic development is essential for the villages to achieve self-reliance on a village level. AITC needs to work closely with the ANSCA corporations and AFN to promote economic development on the village and regional level to the benefit of the ANSCA shareholders. At the same time, AITC needs to encourage the tribal governments in economic development if it's so desired by the tribes. The promotion of

cooperation is essential in the development of resources by all village/regional organizations on the local level.

Finally, on the international level, AITC needs to be kept informed of the activities of international organizations promoting the rights of indigenous people, such as the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC), International Treaty Council (ITC), United Nations and others.

The success to achieving some AITC goals will rely on the support of the membership and the working relationship with other statewide organizations such as the AFN, RurAL CAP,

RARA, AEWC including State, federal and statewide organizations such as the Association of Alaska School Boards, Alaska Municipal League and others.

The opportunity exists for Alaska tribes to finally be heard on the local, national and international levels of policy development. AITC membership is open to any village organized traditionally or under the provisions of the IRA.

We are a part of the family of Nations and our involvement on issues effecting our inherent rights essential to the continued existence of our ethnic tribes in

Continued on page 6

The Alaska Inter-Tribal Council

Continued from page 3

the future. We are a part of the world's society and we're put into our respective homelands to insure our 7th generation benefit from the Mother Earth just as we benefit from today's world.

The historic day of the signing of the Treaty and the Constitution for AITC coincided with the 44th year of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by members on the United Nations on Dec. 10, 1948.