



Thelma Apatiki of Gambell, on St. Lawrence Island, enjoys the performance of Inuit entertainers from Greenland at the weeklong meeting of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference in Kotzebue Thursday.

photo by Jim Benedetto

ICC elects first woman president in Kotzebue

by Jim Benedetto

Tundra Times editor

KOTZEBUE — Canadian Inuit Mary Simon was elected president of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference by a unanimous vote of the delegates on the closing day of their triennial session.

Simon, the 38-year-old head of ICC Canada and a former member of the ICC Executive Council, is the first woman to serve as president of the international organization devoted to issues common to Inuit peoples in Alaska, Canada, Greenland and the Soviet Union.

The action took place in Kotzebue, where well over a thousand delegates, observers and media representatives gathered for a week. Simon was the only candidate nominated for the presidency.

She replaces Hans-Pavia Rosing of Greenland, the popular president of ICC for the past six years. Rosing

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ICC elects new president in Kotzebue



It was standing room only in the Kotzebue Middle School's gymnasium Thursday night, as spectators enjoyed the performers from Greenland during the meeting of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference. The ICC meets once every three years. The gathering drew over 1,000 delegates, observers and media. photo by Jim Benedetto

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leaves the ICC for a post in the Home Rule Parliament in his native Greenland.

Simon credits Rosing for having made the ICC a "thriving organization that has been able to do some substantial work."

"One of the things that Hans-Pavia Rosing was faced with is that he had to set up an organization that didn't exist when he became president," she said.

The ICC was formed in 1977, and Rosing became its first president in 1980.

"Six years isn't a very long time in the life of an organization like the ICC, and there have been certain accomplishments while Hans-Pavia was president," Simon said.

Asked if the election of a woman president of ICC was a significant event, Simon said that it was.

"I think it's a step forward for our

people in many ways," she said. "In the past, like in any society, the women have had a certain role to play within the family, but over the years, it has become more acceptable that we play a more active role in the modern-day world, in terms of working outside of the home.

"Slowly, that recognition has expanded into the role of being in elected positions, where you are responsible for running organizations and being elected politically.

"So there has been an evolving process, and now, for the first time, there will be a woman president of our international organization," Simon told the *Tundra Times*.

Simon has long been considered one of the mainstays of the organization, as proficient at getting things done at the "nuts and bolts" level as she is at articulating ICC policy.

"I've been very supportive of the ICC right from its inception; I've worked very hard, and I've done a lot of volunteer work for the organization to make sure that certain things were successful in ensuring that the mandates that were given by general assemblies were carried out. So I've always been a very active supporter of the ICC," Simon said.

Simon was also the principal author of the major policy document under consideration by the delegations during the conference, "Draft Principles for an Arctic Policy," and addressed the delegates on the potential benefits of a comprehensive Arctic policy.

Previously, Simon was president of the Makavik Corporation, created under the James Bay-Northern Quebec Agreement, a Canadian land claims settlement similar to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971.

Simon, from Kuujuaq, in Northern Quebec, is married and has three children.



Mary Simon. photo by Jim Benedetto