



photo by Michael Lacey/Manila

Hundreds of people greet ships disembarking at Sisimiut, Greenland, for the Fifth Inuit Circumpolar Conference. ICC convenes once every three years.

Soviets join celebration of Inuit unity

by Theresa Demientieff Devlin
for the Tundra Times

"I remember where only an empty chair sat in front of the Soviet flag. We always kept the flag and chair there because, while you may have been physically far away, in our hearts you were here with us!"

—George N. Ahmaogak Sr.,
North Slope Borough mayor

SISIMIUT, GREENLAND — On July 24 Eben Hosbon's hope and dream that Inuit from all four countries would be able to meet and freely exchange ideas were finally realized.

Inuit from the United States, Canada, Greenland and the Soviet Union gathered for the Fifth Inuit Circumpolar Conference, "A Celebration of Inuit Unity."

During this week-long gathering speakers addressed the importance of the ICC General Assembly to share progress experienced within their homelands. The bonds of concerns that face each delegation reflect unity and cooperation, demonstrating a unified front to the world.

In her report, ICC President Mary Simon talked of the accomplishments

made by the ICC, including obtaining Non-Governmental Organization status which provides access to various United Nation entities which are currently addressing economic, political, environmental and human issues relevant to indigenous peoples.

She also talked of the second international forum where international

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• ICC gathering celebrates unity

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standards are being set in relation to the world's 300 million indigenous and tribal peoples.

In his speech to the General Assembly, John Amagoalik, president of the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, recalled a few lines from a childhood poem by Lewis Carroll. "The time has come, the walrus said, to speak of many things."

Tying the memory of the poem into this presentation, he said, "And for some reason, I have always remembered that line. When I saw that flag behind us yesterday morning, I was reminded of that."

"It is indeed time to speak of many things; time to speak about sustainable development and conservation strategies. It is time to speak of peace and security. The time has come to talk about human rights and self-determination."

"It is also time to speak of the greenhouse effect, the ozone layer, Arctic haze and to try and understand these things."

"The time has come to speak of the *Exxon Valdez*, Chernobyl, Three Mile Island and nuclear submarines. It is time to speak of Star Wars, cruise missiles and Stealth bombers. It is also time to speak of a new deal. It is time to redirect resources to fighting pollution."

"When the *Exxon Valdez* ran aground, the Soviet Navy went to help the cleanup, and the Canadian government sat in Ottawa doing nothing. I, as a Canadian, was ashamed."

"The Canadians were saying, 'We hope that the oil doesn't come to our shores. We hope it stays out there somewhere.'"

"They should have been down there cleaning it up. It's time that these things happen. We need environmental policemen."

"Trees need to be planted. We need to grow food. And it is time that mankind shifted and redirected their resources. That walrus was right. It is indeed time to speak of many things."

Each of the countries represented had speakers who talked of their problems, their concerns, their progress

and the appreciation of a time for them to come together and celebrate as a family united once more.

Greenland's Premier Jonathan Motzfeldt spoke of their Home Rule.

"The first 10 years of Home Rule have been a challenge to us living here in the largest island of the world. For many years we had been ruled from Copenhagen, under the influence of Danish thinking and Danish solutions, which were again adapted to Danish social conventions."

"Today, differences in culture, society and mentality do not stop at conflict and frustration. Now they are the starting point of negotiations, where both parties must show mutual respect and tolerance. We have recognized the differences in culture and mentality very strongly in one particular field, the traditional hunting trade."

"It is connection with our Inuit harvest that we today experience a culture clash that may prove fatal to us. A culture clash, that may be the most dangerous crisis we have experienced since the voyages of discovery and the subsequent colonization of our countries. A culture clash that endangers the very core of our existence and the whole basis of our original culture."

"What I have in mind is, of course, the sentimental and misguided attitudes to the hunting of sea mammals — seals, as well as whales — that have grown to be very influential political movements, both in Europe and the United States against sealing and whaling."

"If it were a matter of rational, concrete attitudes in support of the pro-

tection of endangered species, Inuit will at any time take part in protective measures."

North Slope Borough Mayor George N. Ahmaogak Sr. talked about the frustrations involved in trying to protect Northern resources.

"At times, as we consider the great wealth, power and the appetite the people of the world have for the treasures that lie in our homeland, we can feel frustrated, almost helpless to protect that which is rightfully ours."

"We have experienced this in the North Slope Borough, and we are stronger today because of it. Back in the late 1960s the largest oil field in North America was discovered at Prudhoe Bay, with the promise of much more to be found not far away."

"My own father had a home in this area. It was his traditional hunting, trapping and fishing ground, a place of great value to him, as to many other Inupiat."

"To the world, the fact that a few 'Eskimos' living atop this great treasure of oil meant very little. They needed it to fuel their cars, airplanes and generators, and they were going to get it no matter what. If a few hunters and trappers lost their livelihood, so what?"

"Fortunately for us, we had some extraordinary leaders rise out of our ranks at this time, individuals such as Howard Rock, an artist who became a journalist to tell the world what was happening, and Eben Hopson. For those of you unfamiliar with Eben Hopson, he was the leader who spearheaded the movements which led to the founding of the North Slope Borough and ICC."

Ahmaogak also spoke of the need for an Arctic policy.

"With a strong Arctic policy, we ensure that they have to react to us. If they feel the need to exploit our resources, they must show us how they are going to do it without harming the environment and the wildlife we depend upon."

"All of us face the challenges in the hunting of waterfowl. International treaties outlaw the hunting of many ducks and geese during the only months they are in the Arctic."

"The result is that sport hunters in the lower latitudes can legally shoot these birds, while we, who hunt them not for sport but survival, are accused of breaking the law. We need to educate the world community about our need and change the law."

One of the more powerful moments during the evening cultural events took place when the dancers from the Soviet Union stepped out onto the stage and captured the audience. Their performance reflected a combination of the Alaska's Northwest Arctic and the Soviet style, demonstrating the unity of the Inuit.

During the conference, Alaska's Dalee Sambo received the Bill Edmund Award.

"There are only some 100,000 Inuit. It's a very, very small number, and that means that each and every one of you is going to be critical to our work," Sambo said.

"I hope that you can bring that message back home to your friends, to your families, to every Inuit person that you know, because we need your help, because we always want there to be Inuit."