

Arctic Eskimos have Historic Meet

Alaska, Canada, Greenland
Eskimos gather in Barrow

By LUCY ANN CARLO
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An important landmark in the history of Alaska, in particular the Arctic, occurred this past week, June 13-18, in Barrow, Alaska. The first Inuit Circumpolar Conference was a week-long gathering of the most important Inuit leaders from Greenland, Canada, and Alaska. They came to together to discuss common concerns, exchange relevant information, and to develop an international Arctic Policy on travel, communications, language, culture, and the environment for the more than 150,000 Inuit Eskimos living in 6.3 million square miles of Arctic environment.

Over 100 delegates and participants from Greenland and Canada arrived on special charters on June 11-12 along with private, state, and federal officials who came to acknowledge and observe the conference. Observers included Jerry Gilliland, assistant to the Secretary of the Interior; Barbara Blum, special assistant to the President of the United States; Ester Winniki, recently confirmed federal chairperson to the Land Use Planning Commission; Walt Parker, state chairperson to the LUPC; Jack Roderick, deputy Commissioner of Natural Resources, State Representative Clark Gruening and Thelma Buchholdt; representatives from four state departments; and George Manuel, president of the World Council of Indigenous People.

It was almost seven years since the idea was originally conceived by Charlie "Etok" Edwardsen, that the three Nations could finally meet. Master of Ceremonies Willie Hensley introduced the 54 delegates who were seated the first day of the conference in a standing room only gymnasium.

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HISTORIC MEET—Nearly 200 Eskimos from Alaska, Greenland, and Canada met last week in Barrow during the first Inuit Circumpolar Conference. Among Alaskan Eskimo participants, from left with raised hands, are Tony Vaska, George Charles, Cora Salceagok, Robert Newlin, Edna McLean, Oliver Leavitt, Willie Hensley, Eben Hopson, Billy Neakok, Charles Edwardsen, Jr., John Oktolik, Frank Degnan, Theresa Pederson, Fred Katchutorg, and Nellie Nakak. Joining Inuit people during the conference were representatives of the Saami people, aboriginal inhabitants of Scandinavian countries.

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ESKIMO UNITY-- Charlie Watt, of the Northern Quebec Inuit Association, and Charles Edwardsen, Jr., Inupiaq leader and Arctic Slope Regional Corporation director, greet each other in a demonstration of international Inuit unity. The show of unity is applauded, from left front, by Arctic Slope Regional Treasurer Oliver Leavitt, NANA Regional Corporation executive Willie Hensley, and North Slope Borough Mayor Eben Hopson during last week's Inuit Circumpolar Conference at Barrow.

—LAKC Photo

Inuit Circumpolar Conference ...

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Eben Hopson, chairman of the conference, introduced a draft charter which was subsequently tabled the next day in favor of a resolution that established a 12-man interim committee. This Interior Committee was charged with the development of a charter for later ratification by each country.

Inuit Charter

The charter well addresses policies on the safe guard and protection of the Inuit resources and homeland; the preservation, retention and future development of the Inuit language; the development and improvement of transportation and communication systems; game management; a material exchange program; and the development of a meaningful Arctic policy. The delegates directed the Interim Committee to have a final draft charter prepared by July of 1978. Inuit Alaskan leaders Charlie "Etok" Edwardsen, former State Senator Willie Hensley, North Slope Borough's Billy Neakok, and Oscar Kawageley were appointed to the Interim Committee along with eight other Canadian and Greenlandic representatives.

Before the conference was recessed for two days of interim workshop hearings, three vice-chairmen were selected. They are Oliver Leavitt (Alaska), Bill Edmunds (Canada), and Karl C. Olsen (Greenland). The four workshops produced 16 major resolutions that concerned common problems of land claims, education, international treaties, subsistence, and an Arctic policy.

Aboriginal Rights

Five different resolutions concerning support of aboriginal rights were passed. They included the Inuit Greenlandic people's rights to the surface and subsurface lands as a condition of Greenlandic homerule; Inuit Canadian's right to a fair, expeditious, and just settlement of aboriginal claims; and, calling upon the international support of three nations in expediting conveyance of all appropriate land title to the Alaska Native regional and village corporations.

In speaking for this resolution addressing conveyance of Alaska Native lands, Charlie Edwardsen explained, "Our government has promised Alaska Natives their land. Since the passage of the Act, 95 % of the lands promised to the Natives has not been given. The urgency, cost, and human anguish caused by the inactions of the United States government is immense. We are asking your support to clear administrative bureaucracy so that the Secretary of Interior can successfully administer his job."

Resolutions dealing with educational goals are well into the planning and implementation stages. For example, Karl C. Olsen of Greenland and Edna McClean of Barrow are already developing a circumpolar educational exchange and cooperation plan for submission and approval to the North Slope Borough's Inupiaq Language Commission of Canada and Greenland. Leaders hope to develop a circumpolar Inupiaq orthography (a way of spelling) for use in circumpolar communications and education.

The government of Denmark will be called up to negotiate a treaty such as the present Joy Treaty between Canada and the United States that "will protect for all Inuit the right to unrestricted trade and travel" between all three Nations of Greenland, Canada and the United States.

Another such treaty requests that the governments of Canada and the United States renegotiate the Migratory

Birds Treaty "to decriminalize spring hunting (of birds) in Alaska and Canada for all Native people."

Conserve the Eskimo

In addition to the above subsistence resolution, the Conference endorsed representatives from Alaska and Canada to attend the International Whaling Commission meeting in Australia to defend the Inuit's aboriginal right to hunt whale in the Arctic. As Mr. Edwardsen stated to the delegates, "The people who have called themselves conservationists have chosen not to conserve the Eskimo. We are further compelled to tell the world who we are. A meeting is happening in Australia where they are going to talk about how embarrassing for the United States that Eskimos are whaling. In order for the United States government to look nice they (U.S.) had had a preselected meeting in Washington, D.C. so that the U.S. could look nicer than Quebec and Russia."

Appointment with the Whales

At this meeting we had sent our delegates and they had informed us that: "how many whales would you guys want," "how many whales would you like to have" as if we could make an appointment with the whales when it comes up to Barrow. The urgency and the total depth of our environment and our association with the whale, who is it that we call resources a dependent upon the survival of both communities—the whale as a species and the Inuit as a species. Other resolutions called up the wise and full use of subsistence resources.

And lastly, of great priority to all delegates and the Inuit people they represented, the conference supported an Arctic Policy which would protect and enhance their people and their environment. They emphasized the fact and the lack of adequate environmental policies and legislation to protect the Arctic; the lack of full participation by the Inuit people concerning rule-making processes that effect them; that the rules for Arctic Resource development will include specifically and provide for the determination of safe technology; on Arctic population policy; locally-controlled wildlife management; an Arctic military use policy; maintenance of traditional use values; access to governmental information; and development of an international Arctic coastal zone management program.

A long debate was held on a resolution calling for the Arctic being "used exclusively for peaceful and environmentally safe purposes." The resolution further articulated that there "shall be prohibited any measure of a military nature such as the establishment of military leases and fortifications, the carrying out of military maneuvers and the testing of any type of weapon as well as the disposition of any type of chemical, biological or nuclear waste."

The conference was adjourned at 7:14 p.m. Friday with a great show the unity and discord by all participants who had attended the first Inuit Circumpolar conference.

Conference participants were grateful for the hospitality of the Barrow people who organized and fed over 300 to 400 visitors this past week for the nightly entertainment which included dancers from Barrow, Pt. Hope, Wainwright, and Bethel, the Canadian Throat Chanters, the Saami Dancers and singers, and the Canadian folk-singers. Guests also expressed appreciation to the families of Rox Oyagok, Jacob Adams, and Harry Akivigak for having had their Nalukatuq Whale Festival early so that the visitors could participate.