



Ramsey Clark, keynote speaker at the Alaska Federation of Natives convention last week is dwarfed by the banner which stressed the 1991 theme of the convention. Clark spoke of unity and preserving the culture. "The only successful genocide is culturalcide. You can kill a people but they remain alive if their culture lives," he said. See story page 11.

PHOTO BY BILL HESS

Paper laws worthless if you lack spirit

By Linda Lord-Jenkins
Tundra Times

Twelve years ago U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark helped forge the wording of the landmark Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act which made "legal" the claim of Alaska Natives to 40 million acres of their homeland.

Last week Clark stood in front of more than one thousand of those "first Alaskans" to tell them that the wording of that document may be good but it means nothing if they don't have the strength of spirit and character to maintain their hold on the land.

Clark, the keynote speaker at the 1983 Annual Alaska Federation of Natives convention spoke on the theme of 1991. That is the year when, according to the ANCSA document's current wording, shareholders of the 12 Alaska Native Corporations can sell their stock, and other protections to the stock will be removed.

Although 1991 is eight years away, it is recognized that if any of these protections are to be maintained or altered to suit the current and future needs of Alaska Natives, agreement must be reached among them.

Clark's talk spoke of unity of purpose and strength of character, and the need to depend only on themselves to make the future work.

"No mechanism or organizational structure ever constructed can ever preserve the important rights to the people

where the people itself by spirit of character were not committed to its own preservation.

"A piece of paper can't do it alone. Whatever a piece of paper says, wealth and power will have its way if you don't have the will ingrained in your spirit to overcome your challenges," said Clark.

"You have to rely on yourselves, know yourselves, study and work with yourselves. Bring forth children stronger than yourselves, better than yourselves, and more committed than you are to achieve that unity and purpose," said Clark.

Pointing out that disagreements can occur among peoples as diverse as are the Alaska Natives, Clark said they must not be so wide and divisive a disagreement that they cripple the final goal that Alaska Natives are striving for.

Cultural foundation must be maintained, said Clark who told the assembled delegates that "AFN has to be more than just a symbol. It has to be a shared vision."

He reminded the group that included young babies and also great-great-grandparent Elders that they must maintain their cultural heritage. "The only successful genocide is cultural-cide. If you kill off a people and their culture still exists, they remember who they were and what they stood for. If you kill a culture and not the people, you can do anything you want with them because they don't remember who they

were."

He cited the examples of Iran and Saudi Arabia which have both lost their traditional cultural values to the lure of oil wealth. "God help them . . . What happens to them when the oil runs out?" he said.

In addressing the specific issues of 1991, Clark urged caution in establishing new laws and rules. "There is no generation wise enough to make all the decisions for the

future and should be none arrogant enough to want to."

But he recommended that the land, above all else, be preserved and treated with respect and mindful of the unique needs of the people who have lived on it for eons.

"It has to be you (who protects the land) because you live it. White people like me live in condominiums and I couldn't point north if I had to and wouldn't know what to do if I did," he said, drawing a peal

of laughter from the crowd.

He urged them to beware of lawyers and legislators, to "get in and get out" when they seek legislation and to "use lawyers when you need them but don't let them do your thinking for you."

As for stock and corporation alienation, Clark urged the people to take a hard look at their corporations and keep those business ventures that warrant keeping and get rid of those that don't.