

# UTA resolutions seek NGO status from U.N.

By Bill Hess  
Tundra Times

State and federal officials may be hesitant to address the issue of Alaskan Native sovereignty, but that didn't stop delegates from the 61 villages of the United Tribes of Alaska from seeking status within the United Nations.

In arguing for a move to seek Non-Governmental Organization status within the UN, Sheldon Katchatag of Unalakleet noted the Inuit Circumpolar Conference and the Inupiat Community of the Arctic slope. Both have won NGO status. "I believe we as a group should at least have the same status as they do," said Katchatag, "because we are a group of sovereign nations!"

The NGO status was considered the most likely and practical recognition the group could seek within the UN. While the individual tribal vil-

lages and communities that make up UTA claim that they have never ceded their right to self-government through treaty or any other means and therefore still retain their sovereignty, UTA itself does not claim any governmental powers.

Its leaders have described it as more of an organization for the tribes to get together, share ideas, learn from resource people, and to lobby for common concerns.

In one of the more major resolutions passed last week by UTA, the General Assembly voted to seek the NGO status within the U.N.

A total of seventeen resolutions came before the General Assembly last week, with all but four passing. While the UTA leadership came away from the meeting with a commitment to work in a spirit of cooperation with the Alaska Federation of Natives, and received a similar pledge from AFN, a number of the resolutions passed showed some

differences of opinions between the two groups.

In one, the General Assembly passed with only one dissenting vote a measure calling for a UTA boycott of a fund-raiser for U.S. Senator Ted Stevens which took place Saturday night. The fundraiser was sponsored by Ice Block, a Native political action group closely tied to AFN.

Last winter Stevens told the Alaska State Legislature that tribal sovereignty is an issue which must be dealt with directly in Alaska. "It has, and will continue to be, my position that village sovereignty is a matter for our state through this Legislature and the governor to determine," Stevens said in his address.

"We respect that man," said Katchatag after he was elected vice-chairman of UTA, "but we can't in good conscience support a man who is not working in our best interests."

Another resolution called

on the federal government through the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs and on the state to seek input on issues dealing with Alaska Natives directly from village and tribal governments.

It called for information to be gathered at the village level, and not just through AFN and ANCSA corporations.

A resolution calling upon the regional corporations to contribute money to UTA was defeated. Andy Johnson from the Kenai Peninsula argued that such an act could be seen as "acquiescence" of sovereign powers. Johnson suggested that soliciting corporation contributions would weaken the position of the member tribes of UTA.

"See," he envisioned opponents saying, "these people can't stand on their own!"

Still another resolution called for a letter to be written to AFN as they went into their convention, supporting six resolutions dealing with the 1991 issue which had been made public in advance. Johnson took up the opposing view once again, arguing that at least five of the resolutions ran counter to the best interests of the people of the Kenai Peninsula.

The resolution was defeated.

UTA took on the U.S. Interior Department when it passed a resolution condemning the granting of the lucrative "1985" contract to Management Concepts, Incorporated.

ANCSA mandated that in 1985, Congress would review the act to determine how Alaska Natives were doing as 1991 approached. The 1985 study will be used to update Congress on what has happened to that point. It will also include the

Secretary of the Interior's recommendations on what future actions Congress should take regarding ANCSA.

UTA criticized the MCI contract as a "sweetheart" deal between the corporation and the Interior.

Another resolution called upon the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs to recognize all Native governments within Alaska as tribal entities.

Support was also given to the village of Akiachak. There, the entire city council resigned, turning over all governmental authority within the community to the village's Indian Reorganization Act Council.

The State of Alaska is arguing that the action did not follow proper procedure, but Akiachak villagers attending the General Assembly argued that the action was proper within the inherent sovereignty they possessed before there ever was an Alaska.

Other resolutions passed by UTA:

Encouraged member villages to adopt tribal codes and to "make full use of their sovereign powers."

Support the Association for Stranded Rural Alaskans in Anchorage in its efforts to obtain funding. ASRAA, which helps rural people return home after running into trouble in Anchorage, and which provides many additional services, is in danger of closing down because of a funding cut.

Called for more state funding for alcohol programs.

Established five "area" vice-presidential positions within the leadership of UTA.

Called for "reform" in the state "limited entry" fishing permits.



Cerosky Charlie of Minto.

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