

# ***Powerful theme for ICC Assembly***

***Tundra Times staff***

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With several tent cities expected to spring up to accommodate an international crowd, Nome might look more like its Gold Rush origins than it has in years. But looking at its ambitious agenda, there's no question that the 7th General Assembly of the

Inuit Circumpolar Conference is a large, vital gathering of indigenous peoples.

Since their last assembly three years ago, developments in Arctic and sub-Arctic nations have brought both new challenges and new opportunities for Inuit people in Alaska, Canada, Greenland, Saamiland and Russia. The ICC

is a political organization conceived by the late Eben Hopson of Barrow to address critical issues affecting all Inuit with a united voice.

The theme for this year's assembly, set to open July 24, is: "Inuit Way of Life - A Human Right." It underscores threats to

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Inuit culture occurring on several fronts, including health, environmental and economic concerns. While numerous cultural activities and plenary speakers will enliven and inform the five-day event, it is the panel discussions that most closely reflect what this session is all about.

A panel on health issues July 25 will likely offer good news and bad. The bad news will be updates on a number of concerns common throughout the circumpolar north, including suicide, substance abuse and the erosion of language and cultural values. Organizers say, however, that there will also be case studies of initiatives that are making headway in these areas.

A July 26 panel will examine issues related to economic development and international trade and how Inuit can work together effectively in the global economy. This discussion will include an analysis of opportunities available through international development work and trade linkages with indigenous peoples around the world.

Two of the most compelling discussions will focus on environmental issues:

*Environmental Contaminants* (July 27) - This panel will focus on the types of pollutants found in the Arctic food chain, how they get there and what Inuit might do to combat this problem. Guest speakers, including scientists, will discuss the risks associated with eating, and avoiding, Native foods. The aim of the panel is to provide information in plain language on sources, transport and accumulation of contaminants; communication and research; benefits of Inuit foods; and international responses and activities.

*Utilization of Living Resources* (July 27) - This panel will deal with the rights of Inuit to use animals in a sustainable manner. It will highlight the nature and tactics of the increasingly vocal animal rights movement around the world and their effects on Inuit use of these animals. Speakers will focus on the nutritional, spiritual and economic dimensions of hunting animals in the context of maintaining a sustainable environment. It will also include discussion of the commercialization of living resources, including successful case histories.

There will also be a discussion on ICC goals for the U.N. Decade of Indigenous Peoples and building closer ties with the United Nations to achieve those goals.

Numerous plenary speakers are slated for the assembly, including prominent government officials and academic leaders from all nations represented at the gathering.