



Don Wright addresses leaders and supporters of Native governments.

PHOTO BY BILL HESS

# Statewide IRA group begun

By Bill Hess

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In what many participants hailed as a major moment in Alaskan history, delegates representing Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) and Native traditional village governments gathered together in Anchorage last week and laid the foundation for forming a statewide IRA organization.

The action took place at a two-day conference sponsored by the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) to look at issues surrounding the IRA governments. Legally, Alaska Native villages find their powers the center of much dispute. Different speakers at the conference agreed that the sovereign powers held by aboriginal groups have never been lost by Alaska's Indian, Eskimo and Aleut peoples.

The problems arise, it was argued, when villages in Alaska seek to exercise that authority. Reservations in the Lower 48 have definite land bases over which to exercise their jurisdiction. After the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, most of the Alaska lands which remained in Native hands were turned over to state-chartered regional and village corporations.

IRA and traditional governments have a special relationship with the U.S. Federal government independent of the state. Putting Native lands in state-chartered corporations presents some complex problems.

Don Wright, an Interior Indian who played a major

role in the original ANCSA negotiations, told a receptive audience that there is an answer: remove corporate lands from their state charters and instead charter them under the Native governments themselves. Then, said Wright, the governments will have a land base over which to govern,

and the lands will be free from takeover by non-Native interests after 1991. Other speakers, some who were received with virtually no enthusiasm, argued that it was not that easy.

The TUNDRA TIMES will take a more detailed look in next week's issue.