

Alaska Natives, AK Commercial team up to help Russian Yupiks

Four Alaskan organizations are responding to a plea from Russian Natives to help them put food on the table. Last July, representatives from NANA Regional Corp. and the Inuit Circumpolar Conference visited the villages along the Chukotka coast and were asked by local people for help with subsistence hunting.

"Indigenous peoples such as the Yupik in Chukotka have been hit especially hard by the rapid changes occurring in Russia. It's a desperate situation," said Caleb Pungowiyi, president of the Inuit

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Chukotka outboards . . .

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Circumpolar Conference (ICC). He added that the Russian Natives face severe shortages of everything.

When asked by the Alaskans what they needed most urgently, the immediate response was outboard motors for seal and walrus hunting. The decay and disarray of Russia's economic system has made it extremely difficult for the Yupiks to purchase basic subsistence equipment needed to reach traditionally hunted species.

In response, Charlie Curtis, president of NANA, and Jim Campbell, president of Alaska Commercial Co. have worked out an agreement to get the Russian Yupik what they need. They plan

to donate six Yamaha outboard motors, which will be flown from Kotzebue by Baker Aviation.

Pungowiyi acknowledged the outboards won't solve all the Yupiks' problems but added "It's a start and a response to a direct request that will help feed people in need." He predicted that the Visa Free Program, which allows a much freer flow of peoples and goods between Alaska and Chukotka, will facilitate the provision of spare parts for the new motors.

According to Pungowiyi, the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, an international organization representing Inuit peoples from Chukotka, Canada, Greenland as

well as Alaska, is reviewing options for addressing the more structural problems confronting the Chukchi and Yupik peoples in Russia.

Ludmilla Ainana, ICC Executive Council member and leader of the Yupik Association of Chukotka, said their group is "extremely thankful for this generous donation." She added that her association will ensure that the outboards will be distributed to local hunters.

The Russian Yupik were able to join the ICC as full members only last year, and Pungowiyi said he hopes this formal alliance will lead to more cooperative problem-solving in the near future.