

Year of Indigenous Peoples has set stage for indigenous decade

We are proud to bring you this special issue of Tundra Times, commemorating the United Nations Year of Indigenous Peoples/1993. Our coverage focuses on the accomplishments of several Alaska Native groups and individuals who have gone out of their way to make common cause with other indigenous peoples in other parts of the world.

These connections are not new. Alaska Natives sought and secured the political and financial support of tribes in the Lower 48 when they lobbied for settlement of long-standing land claims. Ever since passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) in 1971, Native people from all over the world—Canada, Australia, Siberia and South America and elsewhere in the U.S.—have trekked to Alaska to study the settlement's unprecedented social experiment and seek ways to apply its lessons to their own situations. More recently, as Alaska Natives have sought to reinvigorate tribal traditions and institutions, largely in response to some of the unfulfilled promises of ANCSA, networking with other tribes has taken on fresh significance.

In their travels, Alaska Natives have learned that Native peoples in many places are struggling against physical violence and the worst forms of unbridled racism and cultural bigotry. They have returned determined to help their newfound friends and kin, win this struggle. And they have renewed determination to improve indigenous policies at home. True, they don't live under the imminent threat of death, but why, they ask, should they settle for anything less than the complete eradication of genocide in all its forms, both obvious and subtle?

As we prepared this issue, we pondered whether the Year of Indigenous Peoples had focused the plight and promise of indigenous traditions sufficiently to prompt policy changes by dominant governments. Then, as if in answer to our question, we learned that the United Nations has decided to designate 1995-2005 as the Decade of Indigenous Peoples. This is heartening news, as we feel it provides an opportunity to keep the indigenous agenda of survival, personal and collective safety, self-government, sustainable development and environmental sanity, where it ought to be, front and center of the world stage until all peoples are free from fear and want, period.

