

# No political boundaries can divide Inuit people: Rosing

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When Hans-Pavia Rosing travels from his native Greenland into Northern Canada and Alaska, he does not see the lines and political boundaries which divide and separate these lands on maps and globes.

Rather, Rosing sees a great expanse of earth and sea, rich in the resources which have long supported a people separated by tremendous distances, yet bound together by a common language and lifestyle.

Impossible as it may sound, Rosing looks for the day when the Native peoples of the Arctic will be able to find independence and govern themselves as a separate national entity. Rosing is the president of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, which is a confederation of all the different Eskimo cultures in North America and Greenland.

"Independence is a goal I would see for the whole circumpolar area," Rosing explains. "No one wants to be governed from someplace else, someplace far away."

"Someday, I'm not saying in my lifetime, an Inuit nation will be formed. Someday there will be a wish to be independent," Rosing points out that in Greenland, decisions affecting the Eskimo groups there have long been and often still are made in Denmark, a European country much different than the great island it colonized two-and-a-half centuries ago.

Recently Greenland reached a home-rule agreement with Denmark, yet the European nation still has strong influence in the island country.

The Inuit peoples of the north also are separated by thousands of miles, Rosing admits, but their interests are very similar. They rely on the bounty of the land and sea for taking whales and seals and fish for their subsistence lifetimes — a lifestyle which is threatened in all three countries as big industry moves in to take out oil.

Oil and gas and mineral wealth are bringing in technology and more people which could prove devastating to sea and land animal life.

The ICC is the brainchild of the late Eben Hopson Sr., the first mayor of the North Slope Borough, whose efforts led to the first meeting of representatives from the three nations in Barrow in 1977.

Hopson had the vision to realize that the Natives of the Arctic regions interests were tied together and would have to be protected from the nations whose borders cross Inuit lands.

The ICC constitution was accepted and the organizations officially founded when delegates gathered together again

during the summer of 1980 in Nuuk, Greenland.

A problem ICC members must now face is keeping communication and contacts strong between members in villages thousands of miles apart, connected by no highways or even direct airline flights.

When Rosing traveled from Nuuk to Barrow recently, he had to fly into Europe and then the Lower 48 just to get there.

A major concern of Rosing's which has not received much attention in Alaska but which Rosing believes poses a great threat to the entire Arctic is the proposed Arctic Pilot Project. The resources of the North can be harvested only if companies have a feasible way to transport them to market. Led by Petro-Canada, a consortium of companies is seeking to test the possibilities of transporting liquified natural gas through the Arctic waters year around. Giant supertankers would smash their way through the ice.

Initially, two 200,000 horsepower ice-breaking supertankers would run from an island site in the Northwest Territories, through the Northwest Passage, and to a Canadian port on the East Coast. "The route of this passage is what we're concerned with," says Rosing. "It would pass through one of the most ecologically rich areas in the world, where there are many seals and whales; where most of the beluga whales in the Arctic breed."

Rosing explains that whales rely heavily on sounds they transmit underwater, like a submarine's sonar radar but more complicated, and that the noises thrown off by what would eventually be as many as 300 supertankers a year crashing through the ice would almost undoubtedly be very confusing to the whales.

"This would disrupt subsistence in the entire Arctic," Rosing claims. "These sea animals migrate all through the Arctic. They don't give a damn about political boundaries!" Were the project to be carried out successfully, Rosing believes it would not be long before supertankers were also blasting their way westward through Alaskan waters, and would be carrying petroleum as well as liquified gas.

Fishing groups in Greenland and Canada have joined with the ICC and Greenland in opposing the plan, and the Greenlandic Natives have received support from Denmark, and plan to go to the United Nations. The North Slope Borough has taken a strong stand against the project through the ICC. Rosing emphasizes, stressing that he would like to see even more support come

from Alaska.

Inuit autonomy over traditional waters and resources is vital, Rosing says. He points to similar problems related to proposed off-shore oil drilling in Arctic ice off of Alaska's Beaufort Sea. The Inupiat of the North Slope have been fighting the proposed drilling as an encroachment on Inupiat sovereignty over the Arctic waters. Even as supertanker noise can disrupt whale lifestyles, so too do the Inupiat believe the noise produced by drilling operations will confuse the bowhead whales so vital to subsistence living.

The ICC, Rosing says, seeks recognition of Inuit sovereignty over the Arctic waters.

"Of course, we want to stop it totally," Rosing says of the Arctic Pilot Project. "At the same time, we don't say 'stop, and leave, right now!' We want to have more research done. It would be suicide in a way to go ahead with such a project with very little scientific research."

Rosing stresses that although he would like to see the research, he would never want to see the project go into operation, nor would he like to see other Arctic resource projects take place which stand to damage the Arctic environment.

"You can read reports for the rest of your life," he notes of the efforts of petroleum



Hans-Pavia Rosing

PHOTO BY BILL HESS

companies to get into the Arctic. "In the meanwhile, if you go ahead, it only takes one major oil spill to wipe out the basis of our lives. It seems silly to me to spend billions of dollars getting out a resource that will only last about 50 years, when you are going to wipe out the resources that have sustained a culture for thousands of years!"

The Inuit of the North are few in numbers and have comparatively few dollars to throw into the fight, Rosing points out. "The Arctic Pilot Project has already used more than \$600 million dollars to push their plans, while the Inuit have succeeded in scraping together a couple of million dollars. Millions of people in the U.S. will of course give a damn about 25,000 Inuit who

want to protect some fish!"

The opposing interests, mainly the oil companies, seek to divide the Natives on issues, Rosing believes. "Once you divide us, it is easy to divide us even more. They are very clever at this. They have the money to be very clever!"

Rosing points to Alaska, where NANA Regional Corp. has expressed interest in oil development of Cross Island, an area which the Inupiat of Barrow consider essential to their subsistence lifestyle, as an example of such oil-company inspired division.

The ultimate Inuit unity, Rosing stresses, would be an Inuit Nation. "People may say it's just a dream, they may laugh," Rosing says. It will be a long and hard struggle. But it is a goal, something to work for!"