

ICC conference may have Russian participants

By Bill Hess
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When the Inuit peoples of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference have gotten together in the past, one group has always been missing — those from the Soviet Union. ICC officials are cautiously optimistic that this year, the Inuit peoples of the Soviet Union will be represented at the General Assembly to be held in late July at Canada's Frobisher Bay.

Inuits now involved in the

ICC come from Greenland, Canada and Alaska.

Dalee Sambo, director of the ICC office in Anchorage, was recently given exciting words of encouragement from Soviet officials visiting Alaska.

Sambo spoke most extensively with Vladimir Panchenkhin of the International Office of the Soviet Medical Workers Union. Along with other countrymen, Panchenkhin had been touring health facilities in Alaska, including those run by the North Slope Borough in Bar-

row.

According to Sambo, Panchenkhin said the Soviets were looking very favorably at an invitation submitted by the ICC through the Canadian government.

Under the invitation, six cultural observers — Siberian Yupiks consisting of three dancer/singers and three drummers would come to show their traditional heritage.

Hopefully, at least some of the performers would be blood relatives of Alaskan Siberian Yupiks. Two additional observers and a possible interpreter would also come.

Perhaps the most promising sign of the Soviets' attitude to the exchange is the fact that they are already making plans for either the USSR Ministry of Culture or the USSR Union of Friendship Society to cover all costs of the group to and from Montreal, with the remainder of the expenses to be picked up by the ICC.

Sambo said Panchenkhin told her that the ICC should be patient in following all the steps of protocol involved, and to be patient with the Soviet government as well as with the U.S. State Department.

ICC is stressing the cultural nature of the exchange, and its own non-governmental status. Sambo noted every effort is being made to keep the negotiations — and the subsequent visit — free of political overtones. "When they come, we won't be attacking them with questions, like how does their government treat them, and what is the status of their cultural lifestyle, their hunting and fishing?"

Such happenings could dampen the possibilities for future exchanges with the Soviets, Sambo explained.

Panchenkhin assured Sambo that despite the differences between governments of the four nations native to the Inuit people, the Soviets can look at the exchange from a "hu-

mane aspect." She said they talked of the possibility that having blood relatives of Native people on both sides of the U.S.—Soviet border could eventually help soothe differences on all sides.

If all goes as planned, Yuri Tytkheu, a Siberian Yupic who has visited Alaska, would probably be one of the two observers who would attend. Rythkheu is a member of the Soviet Writers Union and a respected poet. He has also had contact with the ICC.

Although the possibility of Soviet participation looks promising, Sambo notes that the negotiations involved are delicate, and could be severely hampered by any serious misunderstandings between the Soviets and the other governments involved. In fact, the invitation was sent through the Canadian government because that nation has better relations with the USSR than does the Reagan administration.