



## **ICC General Assembly (June 2010)**

**By Jim Stotts, ICC Chair**

### **The New Arctic (The Next 30 Years)**

**In 1980, 30 years ago, our situation was different.**

**In Greenland, the home-rule government was one year old and a member of the European Union. Their economy was fueled by grants from Denmark and a thriving fishing industry. Greenland's state-owned companies were just starting up. Nuuk was a town full of optimism.**

**In Canada, only northern Quebec had settled land claims. ITK was ITC, and ITC was floundering due to lack of funds and a Canadian government unwilling to seriously settle land claims. The James Bay Agreement was five years old.**

**In Alaska, ANCSA was nine years old. Some regional and village corporations were struggling. Native peoples at the village level were starting to realize that hunting and self determination rights had not been settled. Oil had started to flow through the Trans-Alaska Pipeline and Alaska's oil boom was on.**

**In Chukotka, our people were not allowed to attend ICC gatherings due to the Cold War. We raised a Russian flag and set an empty chair at the table in recognition of our missing people.**

**Thirty years ago, there was no Arctic Council, no ICC NGO status, no UN Declaration on Indigenous Rights, no diamond mines, no uranium mines, no offshore drilling in Arctic waters, and very little concern for global warming. The outside was just beginning to move into Inuit territory to search for resources to develop.**

**Let's fast forward 30 years to 2010, to the *New Arctic*.**

**In Greenland, the self-rule government is one year old and no longer a member of the European Union. Their economy is more diverse and they now own their mineral resources including the offshore. Greenland's state-owned companies are up and running. The Greenland government has matured into a responsible institution. Nuuk City is still full of optimism and doubled in size.**

**In Canada, all Inuit regions have settled land claims, the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, Nunavut, Nunavik and Nunatsiavut. Inuit organizations are active participants in Canadian commerce and politics, wielding considerable political and economic clout. I sense deeper pride and feelings of empowerment from Canadian Inuit than I did 30 years ago.**

**In Alaska, ANCSA, now nearly 40 years old, has produced mixed results with some regional corporations doing well, while others aren't. Many village corporations struggle to develop community-based cash economies. The oil boom is in decline and many think the only way to keep it going is to pump oil from the Arctic Ocean. In Alaska, native peoples find themselves in a jurisdictional fight with government over subsistence hunting rights and self-determination. To use an old cliché, in Alaska the natives are restless.**

**Today, in Chukotka, despite small successes here and there, rights to land and self-determination still have a long ways to go. We must re-invigorate our efforts in Chukotka.**

**Today, ICC's greatest concerns are the same as they were 30 years ago: resource development and its effect on our clean environment, the right to self-determination, and improving the quality of life of our people.**

**There are other events over the past 30 years that had great impact on Inuit and ICC. When ICC obtained NGO status at the UN, it opened up a world of opportunity for Inuit. Our NGO status helped get the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Rights. It opened doors to other NGOs and international groups seeking a relationship with Inuit.**

**The Arctic Council has had a tremendous impact. Our Arctic Council relationship puts ICC in the middle of the development of Arctic policy with our respective countries. I consider the Arctic Council to be the single most important forum for ICC today.**

**Global warming has captured the attention of the world. Of course, our homeland is entangled in the debate. There seems to be little middle ground in the discussion on what to do. One side would lock up Arctic resources, have a moratorium on development, and put all the animals on the endangered species list. The other side can't wait to develop resources, particularly in the Arctic Ocean, as warmer temperatures lead to a thinning icepack. Both sides, at times, seem to forget that there are people living in the Arctic with some ideas of their own on what to do.**

**In my opinion, the most significant event over the past 30 years has been the evolution of strong Inuit organizations along with capable leadership to manage them. ICC has done its part over the past three decades and will continue to do so. However, increasingly it's our local, regional and national organizations that will be responsible for the success of Inuit in the *New Arctic*.**

**Inuit have created many types of organizations: government organizations such as the Greenland Self-Rule, Nunavut, the North Slope Borough and many other government entities; economic organizations involved in mining, airlines, construction and engineering, marine transport, manufacturing, wholesale and retail sales, fishing, oil production and refining, and the list goes on. In many instances, Inuit manage much of the social infrastructure including wildlife management, schools, health systems and other social services. We are not waiting for the outside world to solve our problems for us.**

**We have been busy organizing since the first ICC General Assembly in 1980. It's a good thing we did because the next 30 years will be more intense than the last 30. I think everyone realizes that the Arctic is at a threshold. These are the days we used to talk about 30 years ago, hoping they would never come. Fortunately, we are better prepared than we were 30 years ago. Thanks to all of us, thanks to our collective hard work.**

**It's important to remember that ICC is a tool that works on behalf of all Inuit at the international level. ICC is only as strong as the support it gets from its members. The reason our local, regional and national organizations are responsible for our future success is simple. Collectively they are the recognized social, economic and political voice of Inuit. Responsibility lies where it should, with our people. That's the way it should be. That's what we were fighting for 30 years ago.**

**Life has changed forever for us, we can't go back. We are part of the modern world and no amount of wishful thinking will change that. If you don't believe me, talk to our youth. They have a vision of the future that's different from their grandparents. It sounds like a cliché, but it's true: our youth are the future.**

**In the *New Arctic* it's important that we cooperate on many issues and on many levels. Cooperation needs to take place among our regional and national organizations, not just within the context of ICC anymore. I think this is critical for our success in the future. There is a possibility that we could slip back into isolation from each other, stuck in our respective countries. This would be a tragedy. If there ever was a time for Inuit unity, it's now. We don't always have to agree, but we should communicate, cooperate and work together on the issues. This is our common responsibility and obligation. We owe it to our future generations.**

**So, what can we expect in the *New Arctic*? Well, we can expect more of the same, except much more intense and faster, faster, faster. Our well-known ability to adapt will be tested as never before. Surviving with our culture and identity intact won't be easy. We will need to work together, communication and cooperation is absolutely necessary looking ahead to the next 30 years.**

**Resource development is here in a big way and some of it is our own. Inuit have the responsibility to allow development that's balanced, safe and environmentally sound. ICC has always stood for sustainable development and that means cultural sustainability as well. Inuit**

**must benefit from any development in their territory. Resource development in the Arctic without benefit for Inuit is colonialism and should not be tolerated.**

**Offshore oil drilling activities by Inuit should be discussed particularly in light of the ongoing oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. This environmental catastrophe raises concerns that Inuit should sit down and talk about. It's important that we let each other know what we're up to. I hope we can have this talk during this week. The consequences of our actions concern us all. Welcome to the era of the *New Arctic*.**