



COPE: AN ORIGINAL VOICE FOR INUVIALUIT RIGHTS

In the 1960s, the Inuvialuit rallied to reclaim their land rights when developmental pressures and government interference threatened their traditional lifestyle and **sovereignty**. Inuvialuit of diverse ages and backgrounds -- elders, harvesters, civil servants, broadcasters and politicians -- united to form the Committee of Original People's Entitlement (COPE), the first Inuvialuit political organization. The IFA was the culmination of a fourteen-year struggle fraught with opposition: from governments, industry, and aboriginal groups against the precedent-setting land claim. Former COPE members, who had contributed immensely in roles as negotiators, organizers and fieldworkers, recount this historic movement for Inuvialuit rights.





Life was in our own hands

There was a time in Jimmy Memogana's life, when he had to kill a polar bear with nothing but a snow knife and his wits. "I had run out of shells. I saw the bear coming towards me.

I had nine dogs on my dog team. I unleashed them. They surrounded the bear. All I had was a snow knife. I grabbed a tent pole, and tied the snow knife on it with some sealskin rope. I dipped that into the water so it would get frozen. It became heavy after it froze, and I used it to harpoon the bear," he said. He slashed the polar bear right across its heart. "After the bear went down, I sharpened my knife, to get ready to skin it. Only then did I realize my whole arm, my body, was shaking, because it was so difficult," Jimmy laughed.

Jimmy is now ninety years old. He lived a traditional Inuvialuit life, deeply connected to the land. He traveled around the ISR, hunting, fishing and trapping according to the seasons. Wildlife was abundant in some years, and scarce during others, but Jimmy embraced the life of a subsistence harvester. There was pride in being able to provide for his family and for elders. "I really enjoyed the hunting and sharing my catch with others, it was a good life," he said. "That's why when things changed, and the land and wildlife were at risk, I joined COPE. I knew it was for a good cause."

The Beginning of Change

"The change" that Jimmy spoke of began its takeover gradually. In the 1700s, the first European expeditions came to Inuvialuit territory, but the Inuvialuit were able to keep these explorers at bay. By the 1850s, the Inuvialuit began trading fox pelts with the Hudson's Bay Company, traveling outside of their traditional territory to an inland trading post at Fort McPherson. In 1889, the first American whaling ship entered western Canadian arctic waters. In the next 25 years until the First World War, whalers frequented Herschel Island, Cape Bathurst and Franklin Bay, taking about 1,500 bowhead whales. Bowhead whales, a staple food for the Inuvialuit, were decimated, and caribou herds went into a steep decline.

Nomadic Inuvialuit: Big Jim Rogers, Roy and Susie Wolki at a camp with a harvested polar bear.



Charlie Klengenberg and family in 1915.



Photos

Pg 16 - 17 (L-R, top to bottom)
Robert Kuptana and Sam Raddi at the
IFA signing ceremony in Tuktoyaktuk.

COPE negotiators submitting the
first Inuvialuit regional land claim
proposal *Inuvialuit Nunangat* to
the Government of Canada.

Peter Green, President of COPE at the
time of IFA signing, triumphantly showing
off the page of signatures on the IFA.

Simone and Molly
Goose hunting.



Helen Kalvak



Agnes Goose fetching
water with her son Roy.



Nora Memogana packing
daughter Emma in her parka.



Fred Carpenter and Peter Esau with
their harvest, a bearded seal.





Ilaviniq, Wallace Goose's grandfather and Ole Andy with harvested fox pelts.

The Inuvialuit culture was changing: they used whaleboats instead of umiaqs, repeating rifles and southern goods became common. The whalers and traders brought diseases that peaked as two devastating measles outbreaks in 1900 and 1902, almost wiped out the Inuvialuit population. One survivor, Nuligak (Bob Cockney), wrote about this change. He said, "That summer the Kittigaryuit people fell ill and many of them died. Almost the whole Inuvialuit population perished, for only a few families survived. During that time, two of the Eskimos spent all their time burying the dead....Corpses were set on the ground un-coffined, just as they were."

Kittigaryuit and other villages were abandoned as Inuvialuit sought to leave areas contaminated by remains of the diseased. Police reports from this time show the Inuvialuit population fell from approximately 2,500 people in the early nineteenth century to 250 people in 1905. By 1910, only 150 Inuvialuit were left.

The Inuvialuit adapted. Their numbers rebounded, in part through intermarriage with the Inupiat and other cultures. "From the 1920s to 1960s, Inuvialuit families had the responsibility of re-populating, and making sure Inuvialuit customs and traditions were passed on. It was really important," said Randal Pokiak, an Inuvialuk who grew up in the 1950s. "It made people close knit. Inuvialuit interests were the priority, regardless of which community you lived in," he said. "The epidemics, the struggles, the history, these are the things Inuvialuit should understand. Mental strength, physical strength, being aware of your strengths and limits as an individual, these are the traits of an Inuvialuk harvester."

An illustration of Kittigaryuit from 1909



Treaty

In the 1920s, the Government of Canada approached Mangilaluk, Inuvialuit leader at Kittigaryuit, hoping the Inuvialuit would agree to a treaty. Mangilaluk and his counsel refused. Instead, they countered that the government should provide reindeer from Alaska before the Inuvialuit would consider any discussions on treaties. Caribou populations were then in



Reindeer herders at work

Reindeer Station was established in 1932 as the headquarters of the Reindeer Project which introduced reindeer farming into northern Canada. Lack of caribou in the coastal area prompted the Government of Canada to herd 3,442 reindeer from Alaska to provide a supplemental food source for the Inuvialuit. Led by Sami, or Laplanders, the 1,500 mile "Great Trek", initially expected to take 18 months, stretched into a 5-year journey beset with perils of severe weather, high mountain ranges, supply shortages, wolves and other predators. In 1935, the surviving herd of 2,382 arrived in Kittigazuit, NWT. The Laplanders stayed to teach the Inuvialuit how to look after the reindeer herd. During its heyday, Reindeer Station had a population of 90 - mainly herders and their families. It was a self-sustaining community with its own post office, generating plant, school, church, and Hudson's Bay trading post. Situated about 30 miles down river from Inuvik, it also served as a supply centre for trappers operating in the area. Due to a short season for vegetation growth, movement of the herd closer to the winter range, and introduction of modern herding techniques, employment opportunities diminished and the population of Reindeer Station dropped drastically. In 1969 it was abandoned with buildings relocated and residents moved to Tuktoyaktuk or Inuvik. In 1974, the herd was sold to Canadian Reindeer Ltd.

severe decline. Mangilaluk wanted to ensure that his people had enough of this food supply. When the promised reindeer finally arrived in 1935, the concept of treaty negotiation was outdated.

Nellie Cournoyea, Chair and CEO of IRC said, "The Inuvialuit were close to the Inuit of Coppermine, who traded with people from Great Bear Lake. They said the treaty offered \$5 a year per person. At the time, fur trading, especially of white fox pelts, was very lucrative. Inuvialuit harvesters made a lot of money, and as a result owned schooners.



Mangilaluk

So the treaty was of little value. We were lucky that they made an intelligent choice. They had gained experience dealing with whalers and fur traders, as well as missionaries who came to the Arctic. Not having been defined by others through a treaty, the Inuvialuit were able to determine for themselves who they were."

●●● Losing control

Bob DeLury, COPE Chief Negotiator noted this about the government in the Northwest Territories,

Traditional Inuit qajaqs



The Cockney family on their schooner *Saucy Jane*: (L-R) Angus, Jimmy, Qinyuran and Lucy.





Hospitalization became common as outsiders brought epidemics to the region.



A group of aboriginal girls at residential school.

"In 1963 the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) developed a proposal for provinces to take over all responsibilities for native people. This was rejected. However, the policy was pursued in the NWT. The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) was set up like a huge reserve: jurisdictionally and operationally; dependency, welfare mentality, public housing, etc., no tax base, introspective, isolationist. Instead of 'Indian Agents' there were the Commissioner and his employees. DIAND turned over many responsibilities they had through treaty and 'Indian and Inuit' policy to GNWT: game, education and health. The size of GNWT grew rapidly from 75 employees in 1967 to 2,845 in 1979." It is notable that DIAND did not even mention "Inuit" within its name, an indication of the Canadian government's failure to recognize the Inuit / Inuvialuit.

When outsiders first came to Inuvialuit territory, they tried to adapt to Inuvialuit culture. Gradually, as trading posts gave way to government, and more southerners entered the area, the Inuvialuit found themselves subject to government regulations without prior consultation. International agreements such as the Migratory Bird Convention between the governments of the United States and Canada were signed into law without Inuvialuit input, even though such agreements impacted and restricted traditional Inuvialuit lifestyle.

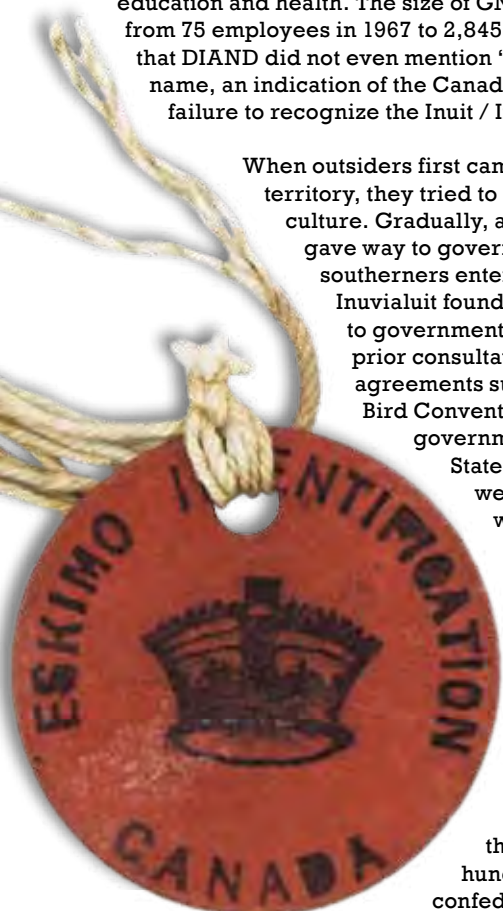
The government's view was that the British discovered all the land in the North about a hundred years before confederation, and had transferred their rights over

these lands to the newly formed country of Canada. Government then believed assimilation of aboriginal peoples would be in the country's best interests. Families were torn apart as Inuvialuit children were taken from their parents to attend residential schools for years at a time. Peter Green, former President of COPE said, "Children like myself, who were living in coastal communities, were not allowed to go home. I lived apart from my family for eight years without a break. The impact of the residential school system was deeply negative, it created social disjoints and instability, leading to social problems."

"Our forefathers were proud, independent people. Then government imposed regulations on traditional activities contrary to traditional lifestyle and often in conflict with traditional knowledge. For example, in the Delta, new laws required Inuvialuit to register their traplines. Such restrictions caused difficulty and hardship," said Joey Carpenter, Vice-Chair of the Sachs Harbour Hunters and Trappers Committee.

Inuvialuit were also encouraged to leave their nomadic lifestyle for permanent government settlements. COPE fieldworker Lillian Elias remembers moving from a small Inuvialuit community in the Delta, to the town of Inuvik. While there were clear rules based on mutual respect and sharing in her village, Inuvik was a confusion of economic hierarchies and social problems. Lillian was then twelve years old. Her father, previously a self-sustaining harvester, had to take on a janitorial job in town. Aboriginal people worked as labourers to build the houses that rich southerners would live in, while they lived in 'tent towns' without sewage, electric heat or running water.

"The Hudson's Bay Company, the mission, the police, the government, and the oil companies have always come to the North because they wanted something for themselves and they



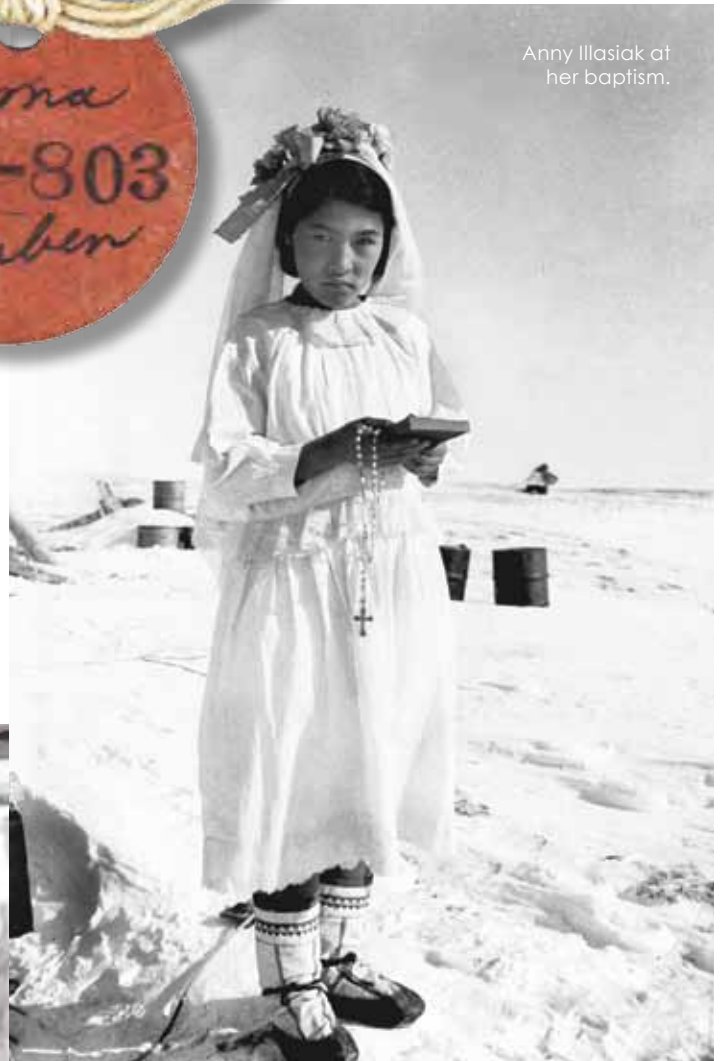
used their legislative and regulatory powers to get it. Always, this meant changing the Inuvialuit in some way, like getting them to follow a certain religion, or follow certain laws, or to hunt and trap for certain animals instead of others, or to speak another language, or to run their lives by a clock instead of by the sun, the weather and the seasons. The Inuvialuit couldn't change the educational system, or the hospital system, or the housing program, or the oil company's activities, or the game laws. The government really only offers native people token power," noted Peter Usher, in his 1973 report for COPE.

●●● Impetus

Change became impossible to ignore by the 1960s. The Government of Canada, viewing Inuvialuit lands as crown lands, gave away permits for exploration without consulting the Inuvialuit. Hunters and trappers saw their way of life threatened. Seismic exploration disrupted wildlife migration and trap lines. Neither Government nor Industry listened



Anny Illasiak at her baptism.



Shopping at stores becomes common in the 1960s.



Inuvik 1950s: housing for government employees (left) versus (right) 'tent towns' that aboriginal families lived in.

to their concerns. As the number of southerners grew, they felt less compelled to integrate with Inuvialuit society.

"Inuvialuit tried to get more aggressive. They participated in Hunters and Trappers Associations (HTA), but these were set up and controlled by the Renewable Resources Department of the GNWT. Inuvialuit tried to redirect government thinking so social programs for the region would reflect Inuvialuit needs, for example through the education council," said Nellie. "Inuvialuit always try to give the benefit of the doubt, to work things out, but after a period of time, more and more intervention in our interests in the region finally provoked us to find a way to deal with it."

Randal Pokiak remembered joining the Tuktoyaktuk HTA in 1970. "The government was giving leases for exploration, to Esso and Gulf on the East Side of the Mackenzie River. That was the designated group trapping area for Tuktoyaktuk, the only area where we were allowed to trap and hunt," he said. "Oil companies filled out an application for DIAND when they wanted an exploration permit. By the time the oil companies came to Tuk to speak to us, they had already been given their permits. So what good was our response to the application now? To me, it didn't make sense," he said. "We tried to bring this to the attention of Government and Industry, but by the time our mail goes out and we receive a response, Industry has already started their activity."

Beyond the impetus of exploration, Inuvialuit were also concerned about the erosion of their cultural roots. "There was a substantial gap for people, between their traditional roots and the modern society. It was not just about the alienation of land for exploration, but our culture, our traditional games, our language, and our drum dancing were disappearing. So the claim was not only about the economics but the social well-being of the Inuvialuit," said Nellie.

In 1968, the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline was proposed in Canada. A government and industry organization, "Task Force on Northern Oil Development" was formed. Oil was discovered at Atkinson Point, near Tuktoyaktuk in 1970, and exploration began to happen at a frantic pace. The Government of Canada was alienating Inuvialuit lands for development, without any consultation with the Inuvialuit.

In the same year, oil was discovered at Prudhoe Bay in Alaska. The U.S. government held a lease sale to give energy companies the right to explore for oil. In one day, the government generated \$1 billion in lease sale revenue, without any of it going to the Inupiat. Acting under the name of Arctic Slope Native Association, the Inupiat of the North Slope Borough fought to press a claim on their land.

The Inuvialuit have a strong relationship with the Inupiat. Eben Hopson, then leader of the Alaskan Inupiat, actively provided advice to the Inuvialuit based on experience gained from their land claim negotiations. He focused particularly on the areas of wildlife and environment, which he felt they were not able to adequately address in their settlement.

The idea of a native rights organization, run by and for native people themselves, was new in the North. The NWT Indian

Photos: (L-R, top to bottom) Charlie Thrasher working for the oil industry; An Inuvialuk looks at a new fuel storage facility in Inuvik; news clippings from Inuvialuit magazine in the 1981.



Oil Spills: Can Industry Handle Them?

All photos courtesy of Dome Petroleum.

On August 30, an oil spill took place in Tuk Harbour from a slope barge carrying a mixture of oil and water in its tanks. High winds caused the barge to swamp, and it partially sank. Dome Petroleum's oil spill response team had the barge towed to shallow water, where they pumped air into the barge to refloat it. In pumping air into the barge, they pumped some of the oil-and-water mixture out into the harbour, where attempts were made to contain it by booms. At first, they said the spilled mixture amounted to one or two barrels. Later they revised that estimate to 80 to 100 barrels, or about 4000 gallons, of the oil-and-water mixture.

This was a relatively minor spill, but it once again raised the question of industry's ability to handle oil spills. A June 1981 report prepared by Dome, Esso, and Gulf on Beaufort Sea oil and gas production to the year 2000 predicts massive activity. As such production increases in the Beaufort Sea, the likelihood of spills and blowouts will also increase. Industry is aware of these dangers and has conducted experiments to test their ability to handle accidents and to find out what happens when oil is spilled. One such experiment was Dome's Oil and Gas Under Sea Ice experiment conducted in the winter and spring of 1979 and 1980. The final report on that experiment was published in August 1981.

Dome Under Sea Ice Oil Spill Experiment

In the experiment, a mixture of crude oil and air (to take the place of natural gas) was released from the

Preparing the discharge sled for lowering to the ocean floor.

Dropping igniter into oil pool on the surface of the ice. *Igniter starting oil burning.*

Oil Industry Plans for Beaufort Draw Criticism



“Oil companies filled out an application for DIAND when they wanted an exploration permit. By the time the oil companies came to Tuktoyaktuk to speak to us, they had already been given their permits. So what good was our response to the application now? To me, it didn’t make sense. We tried to bring this to the attention of Government and Industry, but by the time our mail goes out and we receive a response, Industry has already started their activity.”

Brotherhood had been formed shortly before, but in early 1970, it was active only around Yellowknife and Fort Rae. In 1969, Agnes Semmler and Wally Firth had attended a meeting with the NWT Indian Brotherhood in Fort Rae. Some Brotherhood members feared that including Metis and Inuit would dilute their treaty rights. There were no Inuit organizations at that time. The people in the Western Arctic needed to establish their own organization.

●●● The Beginnings of COPE

Agnes Semmler remembered setting up covert meetings to determine an effective approach to resolve this issue. She said to Tusaayaksat in 1983, “We had Dene, Metis, everybody, on that first board. Nellie was working for the CBC and I for the government, so all the meetings had to be in secret. The Commissioner of GNWT found out right away,” she said.

Nineteen native people met together in a craft shop in Inuvik on the night of 28th January 1970, for two and a half hours. Victor Allen made a motion for an



Agnes Semmler

Habitat Conference 1975

Agnes Semmler, who would become the first President of COPE, said this at the 1975 Habitat Conference held in Vancouver. “This land is the basis of our life and society. We have depended on this land for thousands of years. This has always been our land. We never gave the land away in treaties, nor sold it for money, nor lost it through war. We freely share our land with the white people who came North. We shared the game, the fish, and the furs. Initially, there were only a few white people, and even though the native people began to trade furs for southern goods, life was not too different. We moved freely across the land following the caribou, the seals, the whales and the geese...Now that has changed, the white man has discovered far more than furs. He has discovered oil, gas and minerals under the land and in the sea. Suddenly we are told that this land is no longer our land, that it is “crown land” to be controlled and developed by Ottawa for the good of all Canadians.”

organization to be formed, to prevent further destruction of aboriginal rights. A lawyer, Brian Purdy, who was volunteering his services in secret, suggested that the organization be called COPE, Committee of Original People's Entitlement. Officers were then selected: Agnes Semmler, Victor Allen, Jim Koe, Bertha Allen and Jessie Amos. It was agreed that the main objective of COPE would be to provide a united voice for all the original people of the Northwest Territories. Kenneth Peeloolook then moved that the second aim should be to work for the establishment and the realization of native rights.

"We functioned as a group of activists, with links to the eastern Arctic, the southern Mackenzie and the central Arctic. It was unusual in those days, and disconcerting to the newly formed GNWT. The Commissioner appointed most of his officials. He had his plan, to set up hamlet councils and institutions, to set direction for the programs and services that would be brought in. And we had questions about whether his institutions had the right to make these decisions," said Nellie. "We established COPE because government only seemed to want to deal with institutions that were incorporated or legal bodies."

One of the first things COPE did was to help organize the Conference of Arctic Native People, in Coppermine (1970). This was the first time native people from all across the north spoke collectively to government about recognizing aboriginal rights. The delegates communicated to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, demanding that he recognize the aboriginal rights of Inuit in their land. DIAND's response was absolute disapproval.

COPE's initial membership included Inuit, treaty Indians and Metis. The membership was united, but due to the vast distances, travel costs were prohibitive, especially because members had to pay out of their own pockets. Metis then formed their own organization when funding became available from the federal Secretary of State. In August 1971, Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (ITC), a national Inuit organization was formed.

Initial Successes

In 1970, the idea of actually stopping the oil companies seemed almost impossible. Sachs Harbour went against government and oil exploration company Demonex when seismic exploration threatened wildlife in the area.

Banks Islanders appealed to the government to protect them, but government took the side of the oil companies. Sachs Harbour people were members of COPE. Through the COPE connection, the people of Banks Island learned from the mainland experience. They hired a lawyer to represent them and were ready to take legal action against the oil companies. COPE publicized the case and put pressure on the government. As a result, then DIAND Minister Jean Chrétien went to Sachs Harbour to settle on conditions and terms requested by Banks Islanders. "Southern Canadians protested against the government handling of this case, and the government had to control exploration more strictly after that," observed Peter Usher in his 1973 report for COPE.

The federal Territorial Land Use Regulations were implemented a year after the Sachs Harbour seismic conflict, to manage land access in the territories. Two years later, when Esso Resources proposed a summer seismic program in the Cape Bathurst and Husky Lakes areas, the people of Tuktoyaktuk



demanded an environmental protection plan. They were able to shut out oil companies for a year. Husky Lakes was a sacred traditional area, where Inuvialuit families have spring retreats. Tuktoyaktuk Inuvialuit knew about a similar seismic program that took place in the Mackenzie Basin and believed it had an adverse effect on wildlife. Contrary to Inuvialuit wishes, the government gave Esso Resources a permit to proceed, conditional upon having an Inuvialuit Environmental Monitor at the site. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) would also conduct inspections, with the ability to shut down the project if the environment was adversely affected. After the activation of the first seismic line, fish floated to the surface of the lake. The environmental officer contacted DFO, and the seismic operation was halted.

Concurrently, Gulf Canada sought land access close to Parson's Lake, where oil and gas reserves were being discovered. Gulf also wanted to establish a base camp on the edge of Husky Lakes, and to explore in the areas of Husky Lakes, Liverpool Bay and the narrows connecting the chain of lakes. Gulf's plans deeply



concerned Tuk Inuvialuit. COPE demanded the Minister of DIAND freeze oil and gas exploration in the area. The Minister complied and a land freeze was put in place until the Inuvialuit land claims were settled.

Exploration expanded from being land-based, to the waters of the Canadian Basin and the Beaufort Sea. Oil companies brought drilling platforms, artificial islands, drill ships, icebreakers and ice-class supply vessels into the Tuktoyaktuk area. Oil companies planned collectively to extend the Dempster Highway to Tuktoyaktuk, for convenient access to their base camps. Industry and Government made “sweetheart” deals, which gave them both the legal and financial powers to have the development they wanted on Inuvialuit lands. The proposed highway extension would alienate significant areas of land that were part of the Inuvialuit land selections. COPE had ITC represent the people of Tuktoyaktuk. It also used every possible means to draw attention to the social and environmental impacts on Tuktoyaktuk. It questioned publicly the lack of a social impact fund, which should accompany a government affiliated mega project. A moratorium was finally imposed on the extension of the Dempster Highway to Tuktoyaktuk, which lasted until the Inuvialuit land claims were resolved.

COPE later arranged for representation of Holman people at land use meetings, on behalf of ITC.

Until 1984, COPE continued stand up against unwanted industry and government land development in the Inuvialuit communities.

ITC or ITK?

The national Inuit organization for Canada, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) was formerly known as Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (ITC). Founded in 1971, the organization represents and promotes the interests of Inuit. In its history, ITK has been effective and successful at advancing Inuit interests by forging constructive and co-operative relationships with different levels of government in Canada, notably in the area of comprehensive land claim settlements, and representing Inuit during the constitutional talks of the 1980s.

Photos: (L-R) Top to bottom: AGM in Tuktoyaktuk -- COPE negotiators Renie Arey, Andy Carpenter and Peter Green; delegates Mona Felix and Freeman Kimiksana; negotiator Mark Noksana; (bottom row) delegates at 1977 COPE AGM in Holman: (left) Edward Ruben; (middle) Lena Selamio.

Outside influences on Land Claims

Robert Kuptana was twenty-four years old, and hunting seal in the Holman area when he met his wife Agnes. He had noticed changes brought by development to the land, and became politically aware when he moved to the settlement of Holman. "While we were nomadic, the only communications we heard was AM radio on "skip" from Edmonton or Dawson City," he said. "When we moved into the settlement in the sixties, we became aware of mining and oil companies having an impact on our world."

He remembers watching the Calder case closely as it was battled out in the Supreme Court of Canada. "Calder was an aboriginal person of Nisga'a descent," said Robert. "In 1968 he took the BC government to court, he wanted to provoke the government, to prove that he had aboriginal rights to harvest even though government said otherwise." When the case went to the Supreme Court of Canada, the judges were equally divided on whether the Nisga'a retained title of their land. The appeal was ultimately dismissed because four of the seven judges had found that the Nisga'a should have sought permission to sue. Nevertheless, this 1973 decision was highly significant, as six judges of the Supreme Court held that Aboriginal title is part of Canadian law, and that the Nisga'a had once held such title. "The government had won on a technicality, not on the merits of its case. This court decision surprised the Government of Canada. The Comprehensive Claims Policy was set up six months after, to prevent any more testing of aboriginal rights in court," said Robert.

Grassroots approach

The Comprehensive Land Claims Policy was created to achieve certainty with respect to lands and resources in Canada, where Aboriginal rights were not resolved by treaty or other lawful means. From 1974 to 1976, COPE was a regional organization in the broader ITC land claims process. COPE contributed immensely to the Land Use and Occupancy Studies required as evidence for the claim.

COPE rallied at the grassroots level, galvanizing many to become fieldworkers. The fieldworker approach was intensive. Visits were made to every household in the communities to ensure that people understood what COPE stood for, and that they supported the idea of a land claim. 24,000 interviews were conducted, where COPE fieldworkers and translators sought the views and knowledge of the people it wanted to represent.

Randal Pokiak was in his early twenties when he began working for COPE. Over a decade he was a negotiator and the first President of IDC. He remembered going to every community in the ISR for COPE. "COPE wanted to be ready for land selection. We had to find out what the Inuvialuit thought about land selections, what did they want to keep, and what part were they willing to give up?" he said.

"The families would say why they had established themselves in a certain area: there's fish, caribou, muskox, polar bears; they grew up there; they had family in a certain area. So when you put everything together, nobody wanted to give up anything," he laughed.



Delegates at COPE 10th AGM 1983.

Randal found that "COPE opened a door for me to get in touch with every home." The elders accepted and nurtured him, impressing upon him the importance of the land.

"They took me under their wing. They didn't need to explain to me how it felt to be out there," he said. "I know, the smells, the sounds, the feeling, the physical side of it, I was part of them. 'The elders, the ones that speak Inuvialuktun, said what's going to happen? I don't have much longer to live, what am I leaving behind?' COPE was trying to help get what they wanted for their children and grandchildren. The elders held so much hope, they were going after a dream. After our interviews, some elders would come to me. They looked at me, and said, 'Are you going to go all the way with us, are you going to commit yourself to the Inuvialuit, Randal?' I said yes," he remembered.

The commitment of COPE and the people who supported it was key, as the battle was uphill from then on. It took another ten years, before the Inuvialuit signed the IFA with the Government of Canada.

The Nunavut Proposal is withdrawn

In October 1975, Western Arctic delegates gathered at the Inuit land claims conference. "We went to ratify the Nunavut proposal in Pond Inlet. We were part of the team," said Randal.

On February 27th 1976, the Nunavut land claim proposal was presented by ITC to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. Clarification meetings and workshops were held with government, and a response was expected



Eddie Gruben, Bertha Ruben and Mark Noksana at COPE AGM in Tuktoyaktuk.

COPE President Sam Raddi presenting Inuvialuit Nunangat to DIAND Minister Warren Allmand.

“That left me with no choice. I had to go back to the people of the Western Arctic and get votes on a regional settlement,” said Sam Raddi, in a 1977 COPE land rights work progress report. Fieldworkers spent an average of two hours in every home explaining the situation.”

within three months. In September that year, ITC's board decided the proposal needed to be withdrawn and rewritten. This was a shock for COPE, as the Western Arctic was facing more pressure to develop than the East. The reasons for withdrawal included concerns about defining beneficiary eligibility. Others were worried that the proposed Nunavut government would be no different than the GNWT.

In November 1976, Sam Raddi (COPE President from 1975 - 1980) and Garret Ruben (then COPE Vice-President) went to Ottawa for an ITC Board meeting, where they presented a ten-page statement explaining the feelings of people in Sachs Harbour, Paulatuk, and other Inuvialuit from Tuktoyaktuk and Inuvik. The people were upset that they had not been consulted before the claims were withdrawn. Sam asked that ITC re-present its proposal to the Government of Canada immediately. His motion was not supported.

“That left me with no choice. I had to go back to the people of the Western Arctic and get votes on a regional settlement,” said Sam, in a 1977 COPE land rights work progress report. Fieldworkers spent an average of two hours in every home explaining the situation. Votes were then taken to determine if

COPE had the mandate to pursue a regional land claim on behalf of the Inuvialuit. “There was a very high return of ballots, about 95% of eligible voters (Inuvialuit over 16 years old) voted. 98-99% of people voted in favour of a land claims settlement,” Sam reported.

By then, the Inuvialuit had become highly politicized, as pressure for development built. The Canadian Arctic Gas Study Group had submitted an application to build the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline, DOME had received approval for offshore drilling, and the NEB process for a pipeline in Alberta and Norman Wells had begun. Results from the Berger Inquiry were expected in 1977. COPE participated in the Berger Inquiry, conducting fieldwork to collect scientific and traditional knowledge. The North Slope Inupiat, who had achieved their land claims settlement in 1971, provided a loan to help the Inuvialuit pursue their claim. COPE recruited consultants who had worked on the Nunavut proposal.

●●● Inuvialuit Nunangat

Inuvialuit Nunangat, meaning ‘the land of the Inuvialuit’, became the first Inuvialuit specific land claims proposal. The prep work that went into the Nunavut proposal was reassessed and used to prepare the first draft. From March to April 1977, the proposal was redrafted 16 times, as a result of intensive discussions undertaken by the fieldworkers in the communities, and the three workshops held in Tuktoyaktuk and Inuvik.

Former COPE President Peter Green recalls, “There are three goals to the IFA. We wanted to make sure there were provisions in the agreement to maintain and to keep what the Inuvialuit always stood for and where we came from: how we lived, what language we spoke, where we hunted, how we fished, and trapped. Our livelihoods must be preserved. The second goal was to ensure that we have equal and meaningful participation in the northern and the national economy and society. That meant we did not want to be treated differently, or in any way that would diminish our place in the Canadian economy. We wanted to be full partners in businesses happening around us, we wanted to ensure that we benefited when others were benefiting, from our lands. The third goal was to ensure that the environment and the wildlife were protected.”

Inuvialuit Nunangat was presented to DIAND Minister Warren Allmand on May 13, 1977, the same day as the release of the Berger Report. This was not planned, but it was a strategic opportunity. Inuvialuit Nunangat opens with this message to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and Minister Allmand, saying the Inuvialuit at this time “unequivocally ... do not want” a pipeline, and “we speak not as a people who



Negotiations resume in 1982: (Left) COPE chief negotiator Bob DeLury, Federal Chief Negotiator Simon Reisman and COPE negotiators meeting in Inuvik.

are desperate, but we hold no illusions. All we ask – and we implore you both personally – please understand what we are saying and meet with us to resolve any question, and give us the dignity of settling the question of our land rights before any further significant northern development.”

The months May, June and July were spent by the negotiators meeting with the Office of Native Claims (ONC), Minister of DIAND, other cabinet ministers, and other government departments such as Finance, Energy, Mines and Resources, Environment and Fisheries to clarify and support the proposal.

●●● Negotiations

There was a negotiator from each community. Robert Kuptana represented Holman. He remembered the intensive strategy sessions in preparation for the negotiations. “We had to set strong intention, to fight for the things that we wanted,” he said. “We had strong leadership, with Sam Raddi, Agnes Semmler, Nellie Cournoyea, and our chief negotiator Bob DeLury. Fieldworkers were equally important, they worked to get direction from the people to the negotiators. Many of our negotiators have passed on: Sam Raddi, Nelson Green, Tom Arey Jr., Charlie Haogak, Wallace Goose—we all learnt to work as a team. The government came up with a lot of excuses to deny our demands, but they had a five-day workweek. We took advantage of the weekend to continue our strategizing. Our leaders would ask, ‘What are you going to say if government says you don’t have a right to that?’ We practiced our answers and became stronger, ‘I used to live there, I step on it, I hunt in it, I get my food from it, and it’s my ‘store.’ And if the government said, ‘We need to preserve this land for Canada,’ we had to say, ‘Are you saying we are not Canadian? We are Canadian. We were the first Canadians.’”

“They told us we didn’t need the claim. The government will look after you, they said. One of them went as far as saying, you don’t know how to handle money, if you were given compensation, you will drink it up, you will buy chocolates, you will buy chips and pop, you are just going to blow it. And then you are going to cause the government more problems, because you will be in a worse state than when you started. That made us really mad, really upset.”



A satirical cartoon from *Inuvialuit* magazine in 1982, showing Simon Reisman in a game of ‘Mouth Pull’ with COPE.

By the time of COPE's August 1977 Annual General Meeting in Holman, government had not given an answer. It came at a large meeting in September. In a presumptuous response, DIAND said that this proposal was not really what the Inuvialuit wanted and was not 'in their best interests'. The government was not prepared to give the proposal serious consideration. Finding this response unacceptable, COPE prepared to take court action on Aboriginal title. In November, a new DIAND Minister Hugh Faulker met with COPE.

The Minister and then President of COPE Sam Raddi agreed to set up a joint working group to try one more time to reach an agreement. After a month of negotiations, the first agreement was reached on wildlife and was made public on December 8, 1977. The Joint Working Group started a week later to work on the issue of Inuvialuit lands.

A Joint Position Paper was signed July 14, 1978. It was 106 pages long, and contained all the major elements of the final agreement. The Inuvialuit stated, "We do not see a Final Agreement as similar to the treaties of the last century, which functioned mainly to achieve a final solution to the surrender of native land in exchange for money, reserves, and interim services until the native people could blend into the mainstream of society."

Randal Pokiak, then COPE negotiator remembered, "We were in Ottawa to ratify the Agreement-in-Principle (AiP). It was suggested that we go to a government interdepartmental meeting in Ottawa the next day, to give these departments a preview of the Agreement-in-Principle."

"We had to put on a 'dog and pony show' to these departments, to get them to support our claim. We went through each section of the proposed agreement, and then we opened for questions. Finally one of the government officials said, 'Why do you want the claim? The government could look after you.' That was how he started off. There was a big audience there."

"They told us we didn't need the claim. The government will look after you, they said. One of them went as far as saying, you don't know how to handle money, if you were given compensation, you will drink it up, you will buy chocolates, you will buy chips and pop, you are just going to blow it. And then you are going to cause the government more problems, because you will be in a worse state than when you started. That made us really mad, really upset," Randal said.

"It caught Sam by surprise, and he paused and could only say, 'Because'," Randal laughed. "What else could you say? 'Because'. To us, 'because' means a lot. It was everything we put in so much effort for. To them it was nothing. All this time, they did not get our message. The negotiators all got up at the same time and Sam said, 'We'll see you in court. I don't think you are negotiating in good faith.' So we walked out, we went back to the hotel. We were at a loss. Do we have to go to court now?"

COPE's lawyers flew to Ottawa immediately. A thorough case for court action to prove Inuvialuit title had been prepared over the last two years. COPE had been trying to conserve every cent, choosing the most economical travel and accommodation options, in case of a contingency like this.

"It seemed like an eternity as the COPE team considered their options in the hotel room. Then the phone rang. It was the Minister of DIAND. The government had presumably checked on COPE's finances and realized they had the resources to sue. "I guess the government felt that they had gone too far. Our consultants said there's a good chance to clean the table on the government's side. We agreed to go back to negotiations if some people were replaced on the government team. Then serious negotiations started, the government was finally ready to look at the clauses we had prepared," Randal said.

On October 31, 1978, the Agreement-in-Principle was signed in Sachs Harbour, between COPE and the Government of Canada. Land withdrawals and advance payments were made so the Inuvialuit could begin setting up structures to implement the Final Agreement. The Inuvialuit Development Corporation and the Inuvialuit Game Council were the first structures to be set up.

COPE negotiators Nelson Green and Andy Carpenter at an AGM in Holman (1983).



Federal Chief Negotiator Simon Reisman

Simon Reisman (June 19, 1919 - March 9, 2008) served the Canadian government in positions of high stature throughout his career. He was a member of Canada's delegation to the inaugural session of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in the late 1940s, and made major contributions toward the drafting of the Canada-U.S. Auto Pact. Reisman rose to senior positions in the public service, including deputy minister in the Department of Finance and the Department of Industry. In October 1982, he was appointed as Federal Chief Negotiator of the Inuvialuit Final Agreement. His appointment was a clear indication to COPE that the government of Canada was finally serious about reaching an agreement on the Inuvialuit land claims. Following the election of Brian Mulroney, Reisman sent the new prime minister a memo advocating free trade negotiations with the United States. Mulroney accepted Reisman's plan and in 1985 appointed him to lead Canada's trade negotiations with the United States. The Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement (FTA) was signed by Canada and the United States on October 4, 1988.



Sam Raddi speaking at the signing of the AiP in Sachs Harbour, 1978.



David Ruben signing the AiP;
Ralph Kimiksana drum dancing at the AiP ceremony.

●●● Changing governments

It would be another six years before the IFA was signed. Negotiations started and stalled as federal and territorial elections took place. COPE found itself re-educating a new group of government officials each time. Joe Clark's Conservative government took over in 1979, a new DIAND Minister Jake Epp was appointed. He refused to continue negotiations in good faith.

"It was frustrating. COPE thought we were negotiating with the Government of Canada, not any political party," said Randal.

Peter Green was the President of COPE from 1982 to 1984. He said, "It took 14 long years and the succession of different governments, Liberals, Conservatives, back and forth. We went through six ministers of DIAND. So there were long periods in which we spent just educating people, the ministers, the public, the private sector, and the community people, native organizations, and the oil and gas industry. It was definitely a drain to our energy every time we had to adjust and re-educate."

●●● Setting a precedent

Opposition mounted from other aboriginal groups seeking land claims when the AiP was signed. Only two other land claim agreements were signed before - the James Bay and Northern Quebec agreement in November 1975 and the Northeastern Quebec Agreement in January 1978. The Inuvialuit Final Agreement would be the first land claim agreement signed in the Territories.

John Amagoalik, director ITC Land Claims Commission gave an interview, saying, "I don't think the Inuit have gained anything, and I don't think the government gained anything. I think the multinational oil companies gained it all. Originally COPE was asking for 165,000 square miles of area traditionally used by Inuvialuit, and they only got title, that included subsurface rights, to 5,000. All that other land is going to the oil companies." He went so far as to say ITC would not recognize the COPE agreement as a precedent, or model for their Nunavut claim. He suggested that there were many

people in the Western Arctic who were afraid of COPE, and may have supported the proposed agreement out of fear. "I feel that someone in the Western Arctic should take court action to question the legality of the way COPE ratified the proposed agreement," he said.

COPE supporters understood the circumstances differently having faced at first hand the extreme development pressure. Andy Carpenter said, "We had to negotiate with the government on land rights that was the only way we could get government to the negotiating table. It was the only realistic approach."

"Each time things changed, we had to go back to the people to talk about it, and get their input on how to proceed. Some of them became bored, and did not want to engage anymore. Oh, I don't know how we survived. But when the government was sitting back, we did our own work. The Inuvialuit Game Council, IDC was started, and we started trying to implement programs in the Agreement-in-Principal," he said.

To preserve Inuvialuktun, COPE created the COPE Language Project (1980), training Inuvialuktun teachers and creating the Inuvialuktun Dictionaries. COPE was instrumental to the building of Ingamo Hall (1974), the revival of the traditional circumpolar northern games (1970 onwards) and traditional drum dancing, the Inuvik Housing Co-op, and a study to assess health conditions and health services (1980). Inuvialuktun language programs were provided to CBC. COPE also arranged through the Minister of National Revenue to help hunters and trappers with tax matters. It sought to keep the Inuvialuit



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Photos: (Top Left) Sam Raddi shaking hands with DIAND Minister Warren Allmand. (R) Mark Noksana and Allmand. (Bottom) Delma Kisoun at a COPE AGM; Leonard Harry teaching Traditional Circumpolar Northern Games to children in school.



Swearing in of Nellie Cournoyea as Premier of NWT in 1991.

united by continuing with the grassroots fieldworker approach.

Nellie Cournoyea said, “Being the first to come out of the shoot wasn’t easy, and we knew that, but we had people who were committed. We knew that we would stick together as a people, as we had in the past. We were always proud of our many young people who helped. Delma Kisoun was one of them. She was only thirteen when she started. She was willing to take on any task, including a variety of administrative duties. She developed a keen interest and involvement in the cultural and traditional games.”

●●● Working from the inside

In 1979, Nellie Cournoyea was elected as MLA of Nunakput, representing the communities of Sachs Harbour, Tuktoyaktuk, Holman and Paulatuk. “It was decided that I should go into politics because we were not getting any support from the territorial government,” said Nellie. “The main purpose was to try to diminish some of the barriers that were thrown in front of us. It was not a full time job, I could still devote fifty percent of my time to the claim. I tried to build an understanding of the claims with everybody in government.”

Andy Carpenter said, “Nellie was instrumental to the negotiation of the land claim. She was Minister of Renewable Resources and responsible for the Ministry of Information at that time, working from within the government to help us. We had to wait for the Liberals to come into power to start negotiating again. We lost some of our negotiators along the way. We had negotiators from each settlement, Agnes Semmler, Robert Kuptana, Nellie Arey, Renie Arey, Tom Arey Jr., Mark Noksana, Nelson Green and Edward Ruben.”

From the excitement and promise of the AiP, progress toward a final agreement



came to a halt. The federal negotiator John Naismith was replaced. The election brought the Conservatives into power. The Yukon Territorial Government was enraged by the AiP and the provisions relating to the Yukon North Slope. It waged a vigorous media campaign against the agreement and those working on it. A different DIAND Minister was appointed.

●●● Further government change

A year later, in 1980, the Liberals returned and John Munro was appointed the DIAND Minister. The Minister sought to get things going again. A new chief negotiator was appointed from outside the bureaucracy, but by December that year it became apparent that the negotiator and Minister wanted to gut key aspects of the AiP. On December 24 that year, the Minister wrote a letter to Senator David G. Steuart, revealing that the government's priorities were still with Industry lobbyists.

In the letter, John Munro said, "The AiP reached between COPE and the Government of Canada in October 1978 is in my opinion, a good agreement. It should be understood, however, that in the process of moving from the level of principles to practical

implementation, compromises are essential in order for me to get the full support of my Cabinet colleagues. You will want to ensure that the Final Agreement could be readily implemented to protect the rights of the Inuvialuit but not unduly hamper development in the Western Arctic."

Negotiations broke down and remained so for a year and a half. Attempts were made to cut COPE's funding, to pressure COPE to give in to the government's demands. COPE focused its efforts instead on strengthening IGC and IDC and preparing for negotiations to resume. To counter the government's pressure, COPE sought to frustrate the issuance of development permits.

In December 1982, newly appointed federal negotiator Simon Reisman visited Inuvik, Paulatuk, Tuktoyaktuk and Aklavik. He would meet with the COPE negotiating team and local representatives. The four-day visit marked the resumption of negotiations on Inuvialuit land rights, four years after the signing of the AiP.



Photos: (L-R) Top to bottom: Students learning Inuvialuk; Rosie Albert teaching in the classroom; Inuvik Drummers and Dancers; Alec Gordon drum dancing at the opening ceremony for Ingamo Hall; COPE Language Project: Annie C. Gordon showing how to play traditional string games; Inuvialuk Language Workshop: Seated, L-R: Donald Kaglik, Nehume Loague, Ronald Lowe, Annie C. Gordon, Mary Elias. Standing: Rosemarie Meyook, Mitsuko Oishi, Larry Osgood, Florence Stevens, Terry Lafoya, Wallace Goose.

Nellie Arey remembers having to choose between being with her husband Tom Arey Jr., who was a negotiator from Aklavik, and her children. “I used to travel with him a lot. Sometimes we were away for a week and my kids were at home. I missed them a lot because they were still young,” she said. Many COPE meetings were held at members’ homes, and Nellie remembers having to keep everyone fed and hydrated. Carol, their child, would help her father type and file notes. She followed in his footsteps and is now Chair of the Aklavik Community Corporation.

Randal remembers having to give up his ideal lifestyle as an Inuvialuit harvester, in order to fight for Inuvialuit land rights. He dedicated over a decade to COPE work. He remembered, “Once, I got upset with some of the trappers, I said, you should be more involved with what’s going on. They smiled and said, you’re talking for us. A trapper can’t just come back to town because Industry or Government is going to have a meeting. I mean, the trappers won’t be compensated for their time. In their mind, COPE is looking after them. The trappers decided, we will support COPE as long as they are helping us, we will support them.”

●●● Personal Sacrifice

COPE operated on a tight budget throughout, and had major achievements despite the limited finances. Nellie said, “Agnes Semmler rightfully insisted that COPE not take government money. It was important to build the organization from the grassroots, with volunteers who were totally dedicated and who wanted to do it for the sake of the cause, not for money. Once we started negotiating our claim we knew that every cent spent would be deducted from the eventual compensation. We were very frugal, we didn’t want to use all the money in negotiations and have nothing in the end.”

Andy Carpenter, negotiator for COPE and the first Chair of IGC said, “At first, we sent a team of twenty people to Ottawa. COPE didn’t have much money when we started, so we had to keep the costs down, staying in cheap hotels, often paying out of our own pockets.” COPE negotiators had a salary of \$750 a month, in contrast to oilfield workers, whom Randal remembered were paid almost \$4000 every two weeks. Family members of COPE were also affected.

Sometimes, entire families were drawn to the cause. Annie Goose remembers how hard Wallace Goose, her father-in-law, and Bill Goose, her husband worked for COPE. “Bill and Wallace were fieldworkers at first. My mother-in-law Agnes Goose was a fieldworker too,” she said. “People attended meetings and started to understand that the land claim was the solution to their problems. Whatever services we were receiving at that time wasn’t enough, or it could be better. When self-government was proposed then, it was called Western Arctic Regional Municipality (WARM), and my late husband Bill and Howard McDermitt, Charlie Haogak, amongst others were going to all the communities to help raise support.” Annie said, “I think the biggest sacrifice for many of the IFA workers was having to be away from home — being away as a parent, as a grandparent away from the normal routine of hunting, fishing, eating their own country

food. They had to adapt their thinking to the southern way of doing things, in order to communicate with government. They only got to be home for a certain amount of time before they were off to Ottawa again. They were very committed to making the IFA happen. And I have to say thank you to them. Many are no longer here, but they are here in spirit. They worked hard.”

●●● Nunavut Constitutional Forum

In the late seventies, Annie Goose became a translator for COPE and the Kitikmeot Inuit Association (KIA). Holman was in a unique position as the majority of its people had ties to the Eastern Arctic Inuit, who were represented by the KIA. The Eastern Arctic Inuit wanted Holman to be under the Nunavut land claim. The settlement had only recently been promoted to hamlet status, and government services were provided out of Cambridge Bay.

“In the middle of the process for the IFA was the proposed boundary split with the NCF (Nunavut Constitutional Forum). I found myself interpreting for many different groups. There were times I wanted to say my own piece but I couldn’t as a translator. I learned about the process and what it meant. It became difficult when we had to choose between COPE and the KIA. Sometimes COPE and KIA would come in at the same time, to have different meetings. There was conflict at times.”

“Once, KIA had a meeting in our community. My mother Agnes Nigiyok was in attendance. Two COPE fieldworkers came into the meeting, my father-in-law Wallace, and Robert Kuptana. They were asked to leave. I realized how passionate my mother was about the land claims when she stood up, and said to KIA, ‘This is our community. You are visitors to our land too.’ She wanted to stand up for our people, who were working for us. In the end the community chose to be with the Inuvialuit claim,” she said. “I think the door-to-door fieldwork COPE did has a lot to do with it. People felt their ideas, comments, and direction was heard. It was a choice we made as a community. Today I am very happy to be part of the Inuvialuit claim.”

The goal of a Western Arctic Regional Municipality (WARM) was not realized. “We had a network with the Eastern Arctic. Most people knew we were not trying to ‘split the Arctic’ or have a ‘sovereign state of the Inuvialuit’. Regionally, we were trying to structure ourselves over and above the claim, as a regional municipality, like the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation. We almost got it to happen, but some of the areas in WARM advocated devolution. We needed a bigger shot at decision-making. The territorial government as a whole did not object because we would still remain part of the territory. But it got to the point when people thought we advocated separating from the NWT. Enough fear amassed that WARM was never passed by the government even though we went through the whole process,” she said.

●●● Overcoming Opposition

At the conclusion of substantive negotiations, every other native group negotiating their claim, and their federal and territorial negotiating teams erupted in opposition, fanning public disapproval. In May 1983, Simon Reisman, Chief Federal Negotiator, delayed signing a Memorandum of Understanding, citing federal bureaucrats, the GNWT and the Dene Nation claim and overlap issues that had to be resolved before a final agreement for the Inuvialuit could be reached.



“I think the biggest sacrifice for many of the IFA workers was having to be away from home — being away as a parent, as a grandparent away from the normal routine of hunting, fishing, eating their own country food. They had to adapt their thinking to the southern way of doing things, in order to communicate with government.”

Photos: This page (L-R) Top to bottom: Annie Goose working as a translator, Bill Goose speaking at the 1983 COPE AGM, Wallace Goose (second from left) at the 10th COPE AGM. **Next page:** (left) Billy Day telling MLAs Bob McQuarrie and Nick Sibbeston that they have five minutes to convince the Inuvialuit on territory boundary issues; (right) The Inuvialuit Action Group.

Holman or Ulukhatok?

On April 1, 2006 the community of Holman celebrated the hamlet’s name change to Ulukhaktok. The hamlet is traditionally known to the Inuvialuit as Ulukhaktok, an Inuvialuktun word meaning ‘the place where you get material for ulus’. European explorer J.R. Holman renamed it ‘Holman’ during the 1853 Inglefield expedition, and the Government of Canada recognized the community by that name. This changed when hamlet elections were held on a possible name change in December 2005. A majority of the voters voted in support of Ulukhaktok. Reclaiming its traditional name affirmed the community’s cultural origins.

Bob DeLury denounced this as “a preposterous red herring, and a convenient excuse for those who wish to frustrate the settlement.”

Peter Green remembered having to respond to such situations. “In 1984, fourteen people, Metis, and from other native groups opposing the agreement, were led by Stephen Kakfwi to Ottawa, where they presented a four points list to Munro. Tunngavik Federation of Nunavut (TFN), KIA, the Town Council of Inuvik, the Inuvik Chamber of Commerce, the Inuvialuit Action Group were all against the agreement.” Peter assured the public that the agreement had taken overlap issues into account. He said the Agreement recognized the need for other native people to continue to exercise their harvesting rights on the lands claimed by the Inuvialuit. The spirit of the Agreement was that once other native groups settled their claims, shared use of traditional lands could be worked out.

“I would like to see them settle their land settlement as quickly as possible. I think it’ll be in their best interests, but as far as trying to use the alleged overlap and so forth to be an issue at this point in time, my suggestion to them is that they go out to Ottawa, get your land claim negotiations going, get a package and come back and let’s sort things out,” said Peter in a Jan 30th, 1984 CBC interview.

In January 1984, as a draft Final Agreement was finally reached, it was leaked to the press. The draft had yet to be reviewed and ratified by the cabinet or the 2,500 Inuvialuit of the Western Arctic, but it fueled opposition from other aboriginal, Industry and Government groups.

Chris Pearson, then Yukon government leader said Yukoners, both native and non-native, “remain adamantly opposed [to putting] the entire Yukon coastline under the control of COPE in respect to future development.” The weight of this objection was further reinforced as it had the support of Eric Neilson, a long-term member of parliament representing Yukon.

TFN, the COPE counterpart representing the Inuit of what is now Nunavut, was also in opposition. Bob Kadlun, President of TFN, wrote a letter to COPE President Peter Green, citing concerns that the IFA “contains provisions which touch upon the legal rights and interests of Inuit represented by the Kitikmeot Inuit Association (KIA) and the Tunngavik Federation of Nunavut (TFN).”



John Munro felt opponents of the claims settlement wanted to exploit the conflicts and overlapping claims to their advantage. Northern businesses criticized the COPE agreement because they claimed, wrongly, that it granted the Inuvialuit a ten percent preference bid in all government contract bids.

Randal Pokiak said COPE adopted a media strategy, where they only spoke to the media through press statements. “We felt that the claim was between the Inuvialuit and the federal government, and nobody else. This was our region. This was where we lived. It was not a matter of the lifestyle—certainly there were Inuvialuit people in the wage economy, as there were Inuvialuit hunters and trappers, so we were considering both for the AiP.”

“We were very cautious about these people trying to tear us apart,” said Randal. “Some Inuvialuit were working for Government and Industry, and were scared of losing their wages, their contracts, so they couldn’t support COPE publicly. There were some internal politics amongst Inuvialuit.”

Inuvialuit Action Group



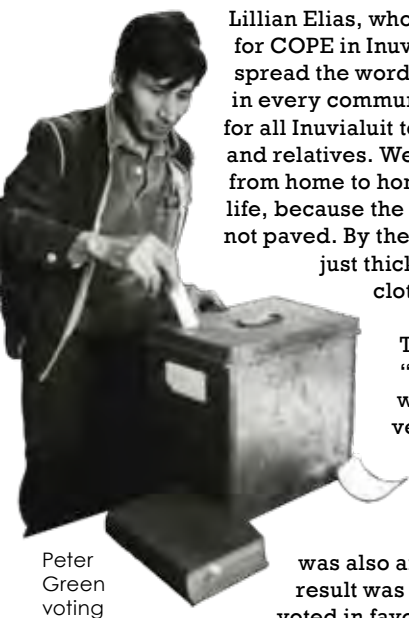
The Inuvialuit Action Group sprang up a few months before the Final Agreement was to be ratified by the Inuvialuit and Cabinet. Randal remembers how COPE stopped them in their tracks. He said, “The Inuvialuit Action Group began to question the AiP publicly. The members of the action group were mostly non-Inuvialuit who had northern businesses, some dealing with the oil and gas industry. Some of them were married to Inuvialuit women. They felt threatened. They said, ‘This is a business deal you are talking about. Hunters and trappers put your deal together, they might have missed something. I think you need us, we should be involved.’”

The Action Group wanted to drum up support by holding public meetings in all the communities under the . They began in Tuktoyaktuk. Randal happened to be home on a rare break from negotiations, when he received a phone call from Nellie Cournoyea. He was asked to go defend COPE against the Action Group's attacks.

"I was one of the negotiators. Ask me about any of the clauses in the agreement and I can tell you why it's worded the way it is. I walked into their public meeting and someone was trying his best to defend the fieldwork we had done. The Chairman said to him, "Well where is COPE? You said COPE is speaking for you, look around you, where is COPE?" And then I walked in," Randal laughs. "It was just like a drama. It is drama." By the end of the meeting, the people in attendance were on COPE's side. The Inuvialuit Action Group went back to Inuvik and cancelled its plans to spread its agenda further.

●●● Voting

COPE worked hard to get Inuvialuit to come out and vote. The Inuvialuit Communications Society publication, Inuvialuit, advocated: The Final Agreement depends on a good turnout for approval by the Inuvialuit. Two thirds of those who vote must vote in favour.



Peter Green voting

Lillian Elias, who was a fieldworker and translator for COPE in Inuvik remembered the frenzy to spread the word. She said, "We had fieldworkers in every community doing this. We had to look for all Inuvialuit to go vote. We had a lot of friends and relatives. We sat in the back of a truck, going from home to home, sitting on the edge for dear life, because the roads were bumpy—they were not paved. By the time you got home, you were just thick with mud, your hair, your clothes, everything was covered."

To her it was worth all the sacrifices. "I had to let people know what would happen if we were bought out, versus what's going to happen if we negotiate a land claim," she said.

The turnout was high in the vote on the IFA. There was also an advance poll. The final result was positive — 1,193 Inuvialuit voted in favour and 258 against. Out of 1904 eligible voters, 1463 cast ballots.

●●● IFA Signing

The IFA was signed in Tuktoyaktuk on June 5, 1984, between the signatories of COPE and the Government of Canada. Inuvialuit, dignitaries from the governments of Canada, the Yukon, and other native groups filled Kitt Hall in Tuktoyaktuk, to witness this moment in history. Les Carpenter was the master of ceremonies. Agnes Kuptana made a tapestry, 'Inuvialuit Nunangat' which was presented to Minister John Munro.

John Munro spoke about the challenges throughout the negotiations. "They were tough times, acrimonious times, they were bitter times between the federal government,



Nelson Green, Billy Day and Les Carpenter



Eddie Gruben and Mark Noksana



Randal Pokiak (centre) signing with the media watching.

IFA signing ceremony on June 5th 1984 in Tuktoyaktuk.

Agnes Semmler (middle) presenting a tapestry to minister John Munro.



John Munro

Sam Raddi signing the IFA, with Les Carpenter



Annie C. Gordon and Les Carpenter

Elsie Klengenberg



“The elders were harnessing young people like myself. We were like a dog team. They put us where we were supposed to be, and they were the drivers, they loaded up the sled, and the final agreement was their destination. They were the ones commanding us to the destination, saying chi, cha, wo, whi, they were giving us direction.”

myself, and some of the COPE negotiators, because they felt I was not seeing things their way, but there was also an exchange of respect, there was also a tremendous amount of determination—May I say to Peter Green, COPE and your President Sam Raddi, you have achieved something great for the North, something tremendous for the rest of Canada.”

Nellie Cournoyea wore a dress that day. She opened with a joke, “I assure you, this is not my dress—I’ve always told them that you can’t boss people around unless you are in pants and a little bit sweaty. I am doing this tonight, just for all the people who worked so hard, the negotiators, and I’ll give it back to Frieda Lester when I’m finished with it.”

Nellie then addressed the significance of the moment. “On behalf of people in Tuk and in the Western Arctic Region, I’ll like to say to Canada and to our friends from nearby regions, we’re important. The Arctic might be a frontier land, a very large area few people have seen, but this beautiful area is precious, and dear in our hearts. I don’t know if it is possible to mention everybody who took part to achieve our claims, from the youngest person to the oldest person, in all the communities. We still have a lot of work to do, but in all the controversy and all the differences we tried to arrive at an agreement we could live with. I don’t believe there was one person in the area who didn’t participate.”

She concluded, “We were never as an organization afraid of people who felt they had a different view. We learnt from that, it’s the Inuvialuit way. People who worked at it really tried to reflect the total opinion of people.”

Randal Pokiak remembers his relief as the signatures were laid to paper, and everyone in the room rejoiced. “It was a great feeling for me to know that we finally had it, we had the final agreement, it was an agreement between Canada and the Inuvialuit. I felt that the corporations we put in clauses within the IFA could protect the interests of all the Inuvialuit, from the harvesters all the way to creating business opportunities, training programs and that the youth would be able to develop, and seek respectable jobs within the organizations.”

Randal reflects, “The elders, the trappers, they were the backbone of the IFA. They selflessly dedicated themselves

for the future generations. The elders were harnessing young people like myself. We were like a dog team. They put us where we were supposed to be, and they were the drivers, they loaded up the sled, and the final agreement was their destination. They were the ones commanding us to the destination, saying chi, cha, wo, whi, they were giving us direction.”

Implementation

After the signing, Inuvialuit were ready to push forward on implementation. Billy Day, COPE board member, and later President, headed up the implementation process for COPE. A negotiator, and a strengthened community team began planning the funding and setting up of structures outlined in IFA. “Although negotiators have been working intensely for the past 8 years and are ready for a well deserved rest, they will help to train new people, to be selected by their communities, and to make sure that the plans follow the intent of the agreement,” said an article published in Inuvialuit.

Peter Green was named to head up an interim-lobbying group to help get legislation through parliament. On June 26th 1984, the Western Arctic (Inuvialuit) Claims Settlement Act, with all party agreement passed three readings in one day. The Act was proclaimed on July 25th, 1984. The first meeting of the IRC was on April 1 and 2, 1985. The temporary IRC board resigned, and elections were held to select IRC’s first Chair and board, as well as positions in community corporations. By 1988, COPE had fully transitioned to IRC.

Les Carpenter was the first Chief Regional Councilor of IRC. In an interview with *Inuvialuit*, he said, “The Board and I are all a little apprehensive because everything is in the infant stage.” Out of \$152 million advanced by the government to the Inuvialuit, \$9.675 million spent on negotiations had to be repaid.

IDC entered its first official business venture with DOME Petroleum, supplying a tug boat to operate offshore. Randal Pokiak became the first President and Chair of IDC. He remembered, “With the IFA, before the land claims, it was like we were trapped in a house, looking at all this development through our window, and IDC gave us the opportunity to go outside and look around. We prioritized going into joint ventures with expertise from the south to provide services. The joint ventures were made with us holding the majority of the shares, 51% to 49%,” he said. Significant joint ventures include a deal with Nunasi to purchase Northern Transportation Company Limited (NTCL). Randal also helped negotiate with Esso to sell its equipment to Inuvialuit, so they could become contractors, in return for a new 30-year lease on Inuvialuit land. Ivvavik National Park was established as a result of the IFA as was Hershel Island Territorial Park. Through the co-management bodies, Wildlife Management Advisory Councils (NWT and North Slope) and the Environmental Impact Screening Committee and Environmental Impact Review Board, the Inuvialuit finally had a say in how their land was managed and used.

IGC and the co-management boards proved effective. Consultation with community interests was now the rule. Harvest studies were begun, and bartering programs were set up to help Inuvialuit who could not harvest for subsistence. Andy Carpenter was the first Chair of the IGC. He would negotiate the first Polar Bear Management Agreement with the Alaska Inupiat in 1988.



IDC in the early years.



Nellie Cournoyea raising her arm in celebration at IFA signing.



Duane Smith, Andy Carpenter and Billy Day signing the Inuvialuit-Inupiat Beluga Whale Agreement with the North Slope Inupiat.



COPE-INDC float at Inuvik's 25th Anniversary parade.



Far left and this photo: Inuvialuit youth re-enacting IFA signing ceremony in Tuktoyaktuk at the 25th anniversary celebration.

“On behalf of people in Tuk and in the Western Arctic Region, I’ll like to say to Canada and to our friends from nearby regions, we’re important. The Arctic might be a frontier land, a very large area few people have seen, but this beautiful area is precious, and dear in our hearts.”

A beluga harvesting agreement based on this would also be concluded later. Andy said, “Alaska and Greenland even modeled their wildlife accords after the Polar Bear Agreement.”

●●● Today

The commitment to the intent of the IFA remains as clear today as it was 25 years ago. The Inuvialuit culture is alive. Both young and old practice drum dancing, and the traditional circumpolar Inuit games are going into their fourth decade, bringing together athletes from all over the circumpolar region. Inuvialuktun is now taught in all ISR schools. A second language curriculum with the goal of rooting Inuvialuit in their culture, language and history has been developed and is in the implementation stage, from kindergarten to grade 12. The Inuvialuit are in a position of strength, with opportunity and choices in harvesting, wildlife management, education, land access, subsurface rights, business and employment. There is independence, pride, comfort and security as landowners.

The institutions established under the claim are strong. The co-management bodies are respected and recognized internationally for their effectiveness. The business and investment corporations, IDC and IIC, are successful and financially very strong. IRC has evolved to a leading and enviable position among aboriginal organizations.

There are obstacles to the fulfillment of the claim, even today. Sheila Fraser, Auditor General of Canada reported to the Canadian House of Commons in 2007, that twenty-three years after the Agreement came into effect, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada had still not developed a strategy for implementing it. In her presentation to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, she found that the Department had taken no action to monitor progress toward achieving the principles of the Agreement. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada had focused on the letter of its obligations, but had not taken into account the spirit and intent of the agreements.

On the 25th anniversary of the IFA, Randal Pokiak reflects, “It is inspiring that our elders who were unable to speak English could achieve the IFA. Imagine how far our younger generations can go today, with the level of education they have achieved? The future of the Inuvialuit is bright.”

**Happy 25th Anniversary
to all Inuvialuit!**