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Warren H. Lindner
Secretary of the Commission
World Commission on Environment and Development
Palais Wilson
52, rue des Paquis
CH-1201 Geneva
Switzerland

Dear Mr. Lindner:

I enjoyed meeting you in Edmonton yesterday and discussing the Commission's upcoming hearings in Canada this May. I plan to be in Ottawa for the hearings.

As you requested, I am enclosing a brief concerning my involvement in the environment and development issues in the Pribilof Islands. Would you kindly attach it to the information we submitted to you in February?

Thank you. I look forward to seeing you and the Commission in Ottawa.

Yours sincerely,

Susanne M. Swibold
Producer/Director

Enclosure

FILM PHOTOGRAPHY

FLUENT TO LIT PRODUCTIONS

As an artist and a writer, we came to the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea in 1981 to produce a film on the birds of this remote island group. What we found was a culture involved in a fur seal harvest as an industry.

That industry has its roots in the early 18th century when Russian fur traders colonized the Pribilofs with Aleuts from the Aleutian Chain to harvest the northern fur seal. When the Americans purchased Alaska in 1867, ruthless exploitation of the fur seal herds drove the species to near extinction. Seals were slaughtered indiscriminately of age and sex on the high seas during their spring migration up the west coast of California and into the Bering Sea. By 1911, four nations (Canada, the United States, the U.S.S.R. and Japan) realized they would all lose their market if the seal disappeared. As a result, the first international conservation treaty of a wild animal for industry was struck and carries on to this day as the most successfully managed harvest for a sustainable yield of a wild animal. This treaty, which allows an annual harvest as part of its management, has sustained the northern fur seal, as well as the last intact culture of Aleut people left in the world today.

The Aleuts were a captive labor force of the United States' government in harvesting the seals until the 1950s when public pressure forced the government to pay the Aleuts wages.

In the 1970s, environmental consciousness arose to question the wisest use of our environment. Out of the early environmental movement came extreme animal rights groups whose ethics mushroomed into a Euro-North American urban attitude that wild animals are not to be used for the fashion industry, or indeed, 'used' at all. This attitude, complex in its origins, has precipitated the collapse of the wild fur market.

By 1983 the market for natural furs was so depleted that the United States government withdrew its subsidy of the Pribilof economy and left the Aleuts to a harvest that had no economic viability. Extreme animal rights groups tried to claim the animal was endangered because of a population decline related to the harvest. No scientific evidence has substantiated this claim.

Unfortunately, through this kind of narrow perception of natural resource management of wild fur-bearing animals, we have relinquished a balance of diverse materials for human use. An emotional attitude that is not grounded in biological fact or an understanding of successful resource management, has ruined an industry as well as native cultures. Traditional communities dependent on sealing for cash income, food and cultural identity, have been severely affected in Canada's north, Alaska and Greenland, resulting in dissolution of some communities and a welfare economy in others. Alcohol, suicide and a welfare state have been the outcome for many natives who have been impacted by an ill-informed public. In the sweep of this Euro-North American attitude, scientific inquiry into biological diversity, habitat

and species research has been disregarded as irrelevant to the subject. Compounding the situation is the lack of interest in the educational process and the unwillingness by the media to fully inform the public on the facts and complexity of this situation. A monopoly in the news media in North America has left a void in indepth, contextual reporting of native concerns for environment and development from their point of view. The urban public has no understanding of a land-based culture and its renewable resource industry. The monopoly in newspapers and television in neutralizing the news to cater to advertising interests and politics distorts the facts; furs and native land-based attitudes based on cyclical time and renewable resources do not contribute to the needs of urban populations dependent on a wage economy. Cultural differences are not treated equally nor are their resources for trade.

This attitude created a crisis among the Aleuts, whose culture has been defined with the seal for over 200 years. The facts ignored in this issue are that a scientific community, meeting annually, has determined the take of seals, ensuring sustainable yields in balance with the entire food chain of the habitat. What animal rights groups have failed to address is the effect of fisheries on the population of seals and the Bering Sea food chain.

Current scientific investigation in the Bering Sea indicates a decline in population of four species of birds and animals whose main diet is pollack. We are not sure if a cyclical process in the Bering Sea ecosystem is creating this problem; we do, however, know that the situation is being exacerbated by multinational fisheries removing more

than $4\frac{1}{2}$ million metric tonnes of pollack each year from the Bering Sea. Unlike the fur seal harvest, which is a scientifically-managed harvest for sustainable yield, multinational fishing is not a regulated industry based on harvesting for maximum sustainable yield. Consequently, because of this lack of understanding and education about population declines, and of man as a high-profile predator in a shared food chain, urban people have blamed the harvest and the natives for these declines.

For many native people, the traditional means of making a living is through trapping and harvesting of wild animals. If that industry is not respected along with appropriate development and technology, we too will suffer as our environments become ever more depleted through excessive consumption and the creation of a monoculture.

Developers often don't see that native people regard the environment as their renewable source of livelihood and sustenance over and above market fluctuations. By removing their skills, knowledge and cultural identity with the land, to become wage earners in a "high tech" development, the native person loses his ability to relate and sustain himself to the land when the market place collapses or fluctuates. Because native peoples of the north live in remote areas, they do not have access to a wide range of wage jobs, other than those based on resource exploitation. This kind of boom and bust development brings in high-paying, short-term jobs which dry up as soon as the resource or the market disappear. Developers rarely spend the time to understand the native communities, leading to high job turnover and tension between cultures.

Through generations of accumulated wisdom of the

natural habitat, the native person has become a conservationist, naturalist and scientist in perceiving natural cycles of health in the environment. He is a watch dog on the health of his environment and a protector of that environment because it has and does sustain life when and if economic trade fluctuates. The Aleuts, for instance, noticed a drop in seabird reproduction, thinner pelts on seals and a drop in the sea lion colonies on their islands. These concerns led them to hire a scientist to investigate the pollack biomass which they suspected was at the root of these problems. The scientific report, in turn, led to the Aleuts alerting the scientific community working in the Bering Sea to a possible collapse of the pollack biomass. By taking an ecosystem approach to their habitat, the Aleuts have brought together scientists from diverse fields for the first Bering Sea workshop, scheduled by the University of Alaska to take place in Juneau this fall.

The Aleuts have welcomed the oil development and fishing industry, as long as developers respect the conditions under which development may take place. Such development must include a respect and a place for harvesting seals for furs, as an economic base and as cultural identity. When development is only seen as wanting to exploit the oil and minerals necessary for all the people of the world, disregarding cultural diversity and appropriate technology, native cultures and whole habitats are affected and often destroyed in the process.

To avoid this we must understand that different cultures

require different technologies and products. A monopoly on a resource for production is disrespectful of cultural diversity. If all people are to benefit from natural resources, and maintain a sustainable environment, monopoly industries are out of the question. With 65% of our clothing today made of synthetic fabrics, with more distribution of plastic materials on a global level, the monopoly resource is clearly oil, whether in products or fuel to create those products. This monopoly is creating serious problems in habitat management as well as a social menace in non-biodegradable "disposable" products. Oil is not renewable and plastics do not break down to return compatibly with the earth.

There are native cultures who do not separate development from environment, which is a non-native fragmentation. There are native cultures who perceive through centuries of inherited knowledge and wisdom that destruction of any part of the environment from overuse, will eventually result in human destruction. The pressures of advertising, promotion and distribution of goods from highly industrialized nations to developing nations and native cultures without regard to their appropriate needs and expressed desires has created in many native cultures, among the young people, a disdain for their culture, traditions and wisdom, no matter how well it has worked in sustaining the land and resources. As the young in these cultures increasingly feel "left out" in identifying with western culture, the eventual collapse of traditional communities will be imminent. In developing resources for global benefit, industrialized nations will have to come to terms with the excessiveness of our over-designed goods, with functions far beyond human necessity.

In understanding cultural diversity we must understand that many native people around the world already have an industry as an economic base. For the natives of Canada's north, the Pribilof Islands, and Greenland's Eskimo, the main industry is fur. When animal protectionists target single species to be protected with disregard for the complexity of habitat and cultures living in a symbiotic relationship with that animal, serious consequences result. As we have already seen, communities are collapsing in the Canadian Arctic, Labrador and Newfoundland, as well as the threatened destruction of the Aleut culture on the Pribilof Islands.

By campaigning to stop the harvesting of wild animals, animal protectionists ignore the fact that we too are high-profile predators, who manage and balance habitats. In their unwillingness to address this complexity, the animal rights groups may unwittingly be threatening the balance and survivability of whole habitats. In shutting down the harvest of wildlife that is not endangered, you open the door by default to more synthetics and fur farming, which in themselves destroy whole habitats.

When the Aleuts, and indeed many native people, ask for thorough research and built-in environmental controls in accepting resource development, corporations do not want to consider such requests because they are "too expensive". For many native people, the loss of land and its renewable resources is itself too expensive. The imbalance between developers and natives interested in controlling development is often met with resistance to

accept the natives' request for slow, carefully-planned development. Last summer, the natives of St. Lawrence Island, Alaska successfully halted oil exploration in the Navarin Basin of the Bering Sea, winning a court injunction based on the developers' disregard of the migration routes of the bowhead whale. The people of this island depend on the whale for subsistence. The exploring oil companies had disregarded the controls set by the native people through a federal EIS study. The court injunction was the first successful example of native development controls closing down oil exploration until these guidelines are respected.

Such a move is hardly "economic". The short-circuiting of the initial costs for sound development to the benefit of all concerned has resulted in enormous wasted expenditures to the oil industry and in court costs to settle the case. Over and over again we see the sophisticated, industrialized nations trying to "hoodwink" the "unsophisticated" native.

It is interesting that this is the first such case in Alaska, for developers usually have far more money and political clout than natives to carry out their schemes. Our headlong rush to develop our resources is bringing down both environment and culture. Without cultural and biological diversity in consideration of industry and economics, none of us, ultimately, has much chance of survival on this earth.

In producing four films on these islands and their people, we have tried to use film not as a weapon but as a facilitator for communication; a tool to bridge the uneasy tensions between cultures; and as a proven instrument of trust between our cultures in communication of values. Through film, we have been able to communicate and collaborate

with each other, trusting each other's expertise.

In addressing development for native cultures and their relationship to the land, appropriate technology must be considered in the context of the environment. St. Paul Island, for example, in the middle of the Bering Sea, is a windswept environment. An oil-based energy is extremely expensive. Wind generators are an appropriate technology for kilowatt hours and have been introduced as a prototype model for household use at the Aleuts' request.

In developing an honest, true picture of the Pribilof Aleut culture and their desire for controlled development, we as film-makers, through the use of our own appropriate technology, were able to spend five years recording Aleut life in transition. The appropriate technology was Super 8 movie cameras, with their low cost and upkeep, accessibility, portability and low shooting ratio with film cartridges. The unobtrusiveness of Super 8 among people and wildlife allowed the natural flow of life to continue in front of the cameras. The result of this technology is a professional, broadcast quality, archival record (not appropriate to video) of a people and a place.

We were able to spend the time documenting the islands because we used technology that was not excessive for the job. The Aleuts trusted our expertise in our industry (film) and we trusted their expertise, wisdom of environment and renewable resources, in developing the script and narration to our edited picture. Because of this cooperation between two cultures, they have a product that they are using to inform developers about how they relate to the land; and we

have a product we can use to educate international audiences about sustainable, natural resources related from the native point of view.

We must remember that all our plastics, microchips and "high tech" conveniences of the developed industrial world are not necessarily the things that native people covet. As the Pribilof Aleut leader says in our second film, Amiq, "If you lose your feet off the land, you're in the Aleut version of hell." We must understand that cultural diversity means a variety of ways in which peoples perceive and utilize natural resources.

Sustainability in the cultural and biological worlds is based on a working knowledge and the wisdom of limitations and appropriateness. These values have been built into native cultures for hundreds and hundreds of years. We will all benefit from honoring and participating in cultural and biological diversity.

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