

# Sustainable Development of National Communities in the Southern Region of Kamchatka, Russia

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## *Introduction*

Our national community "ALESKAM" was officially founded in 1993, but it actually existed long before this. We live in the southern region of Kamchatka, which seems unnatural to many people who believe the usual habitat for aboriginal peoples to be the North. This is not the case. The southern part of Kamchatka is the historical place for settlement of our local aboriginal peoples. Apart from this, migration from the North has brought more people southwards in recent years. We have been able to create strong communities and even the Union of the National Communities, which is called "Yaya" (tambourine). Aleskam is a mixed community, as demonstrated in its name. It consists of: AL – Aleuts, ES – Eskimos or Yupiks, and KAM – Kamchadals, who are people of mixed marriages between Russians and Itel'men, an ancient aboriginal people of Kamchatka.

*Modern Exploitation of Natural Resources in Kamchatka's South is a Direct Threat to the Biodiversity of the Region*

Currently, we are struggling to achieve priority rights with respect to traditional land use. The contemporary process of resource exploitation threatens the idea itself of economic activity for aboriginal peoples.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, most of the fishing and hunting grounds, as well as reindeer pastures, were leased on a long-term basis or rented by their new masters. These parties include different oil and gas companies, joint-stock companies (half state- and half privately-owned companies) operating in the mining sector, to name but a few examples of agencies that are currently engaged in exploiting our natural resources. Aboriginal peoples and even national/ aboriginal enterprises had no starting capital to be able to lease the land, to buy any equipment, or to identify feasible markets and potential partners.

The new "masters" of the land and its resources had access to all these resources. Unfortunately, they have been sending and continue to send any profits made to parties that share their commercial interests, rather than to support the development of traditional modes of life, local settlements or national/aboriginal initiatives. The state has not given the start-up support that they promised to give, and most national/aboriginal enterprises have fallen subject to the influence of commercial structures. Consequently, they were often forced to fold and ceased to exist. This happened because the variety of traditional resources and economic activities (e.g., subsistence harvesting, reindeer herding, etc.) that exist for local aboriginal peoples received no protection in federal law. As such, traditional aboriginal resources and activities were doomed to be transferred from hand to hand, while continuing to exclude the long-term inhabitants and protectors of the land in Kamchatka.

All of the natural resources and the traditional aboriginal industries that rely on these resources within the region, including the vegetation, the full range of animals, are now endangered. Under such conditions, the chief aims

of all aboriginal peoples of Kamchatka are to struggle to achieve conservation of the natural environment and to achieve priority rights to use the traditional natural resources upon which they rely.

### *Creation of Priority Territories/Refuges*

The idea of creating territories of traditional land use (TTLU), to be administered under the head of communities within our region, was first put forward just after President Boris Yeltsin's decree of April 22, 1992, in which the aboriginal right to priority territories was clearly marked out. By the time that the decree had been put forward, we had already established several registered national/aboriginal communities in our region. We prepared maps and all the necessary documents in order to be able to discuss them at the regional level with the administration (government) of Kamchatka. However, at that time several federal documents had also been issued that limited the eligibility of many aboriginal peoples for protected traditional lands to those whose communities fell into the category of "compact living of aboriginal peoples." This undoubtedly played a negative role in the legal-territorial development of many communities. Also, because of this qualification of "compact" living, we were refused the opportunity to even discuss the problem of territories of traditional land use for two years. Only after a difficult struggle did we manage to exclude this wording from the documents but not the problem.

Recently, we managed to create a Union of Aboriginal Communities and began the process of assigning the territory to be designated as a "refugium" under our control. In order that this may be achieved, we worked out a larger programme and several minor programmes for the communities. These programmes are currently being discussed in the settlements, among non-gov-

ernmental organizations of Kamchatka, and by concerned authorities of the regional administration.

One of the most difficult problems faced by national aboriginal communities in Kamchatka is the absence of financing to develop technical and economic bases upon which the territory for the Union of National Communities could be determined and set up. It is currently the Decade of Aboriginal Peoples but, although we hear a lot from our government about the different programmes introduced for the sake of our northern minorities, nothing is being done in reality. And now we have no choice but to fend for ourselves, with the belief and conviction that only the creation of such a territory will give us the opportunity to survive together in such a difficult time and to take part in the conservation of our natural environment.

### *Features of Lands Defined as Territories of Traditional Land Use or Refuges*

The territory that we want to establish under our control is a single ecosystem that was occupied by Souaachu-aiy and is a part of territory where Kamchadal themselves live. The ecosystem of one of the largest of Kamchatka's rivers, the Avacha River, together with adjacent tributaries and rivers, has historically been a traditional place of life for the aboriginal peoples of Kamchatka. The evidence supporting this statement can be found in historical documents and can be reinforced by archaeological data. The national aboriginal settlements of Razdolny, Koryaky, Sokoch, Nachiki, Malki, and several others are in this territory. Apart from this, there are three natural reserves, six natural monuments, as well as archeological sites.

This territory is well known for its wide range of biodiversity. There are endemic species, as well as rare and escaping species (e.g., snow ram, rein-

deer). It also has different landscapes and ecosystems (lakes, glaciers, active and extinct volcanoes), and thermal hot springs. Although there are natural monuments, such as the Timonov healing springs, the most important territories requiring protection are the historic lands and habitats of aboriginal peoples. The threat to aboriginal peoples and their habitats has become even more apparent, since the last few years has witnessed the exploration of these unique territories by commercial companies and by unregulated tourism in the region, thus permitting the abuse of resources by poachers.

Only if we can achieve the status of ethno-ecological zones and protected lands that is, refuges, for these lands, will we be able to use our lands and resources rationally and to conserve them for further generations.

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