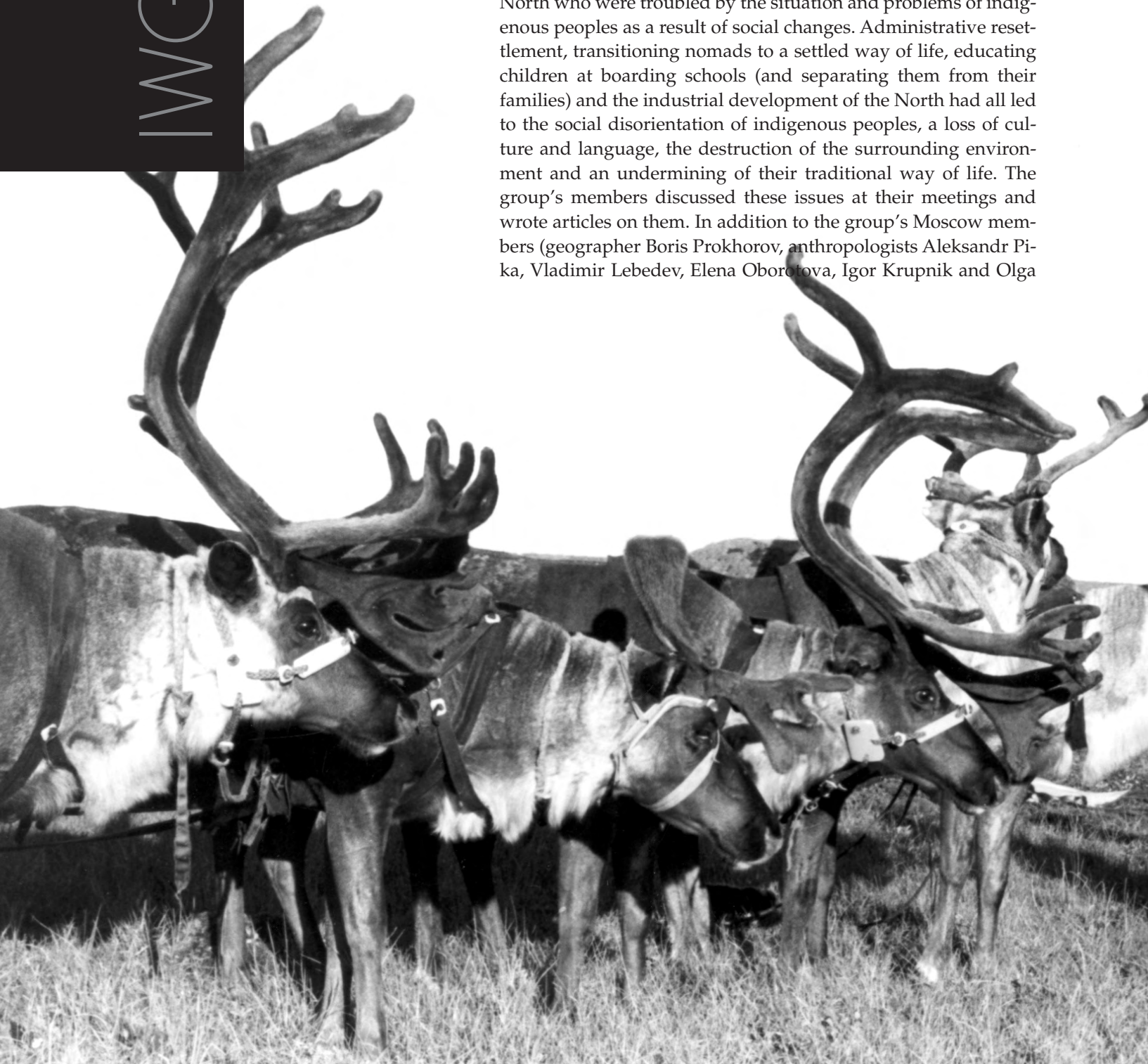


IWGIA's collaboration with Russian indigenous peoples began following the foundation of RAIPON in 1990 at the III Congress of Numerically-Small Indigenous Peoples of Russia in Moscow. Three years previously, in 1987, an initiative on the part of Arctic scholars called "Anxious North" (*Trevozhnyi Sever*) had come into being. This was a small group of Moscow scholars working in the North who were troubled by the situation and problems of indigenous peoples as a result of social changes. Administrative resettlement, transitioning nomads to a settled way of life, educating children at boarding schools (and separating them from their families) and the industrial development of the North had all led to the social disorientation of indigenous peoples, a loss of culture and language, the destruction of the surrounding environment and an undermining of their traditional way of life. The group's members discussed these issues at their meetings and wrote articles on them. In addition to the group's Moscow members (geographer Boris Prokhorov, anthropologists Aleksandr Pika, Vladimir Lebedev, Elena Oborotova, Igor Krupnik and Olga



## IWGIA, IWGIA-MOSCOW AND RAIPON\*

Murashko, demographers Dmitry Bogoyavlenskiy and Tatyana Terent'eva, and biologists Lyudmila Bogoslovskaya and Irina Pokrovskaya), Leningrad linguist Boris Vakhtin and geographer Konstantin Klokov also participated. Following publication of the article "Big Problems for the Small Peoples of the North" by Aleksandr Pika (the group's leader) and Boris Prokhorov, in the journal *Kommunist* in 1988, the group's ideas attracted the attention of a group of indigenous intellectuals who were concerned about the same issues. This latter group included the Nivkh people's writer, Vladimir Sangi (RAIPON's first president), Yevdokiya Gayer (a Nanai woman and deputy in the USSR Supreme Soviet), the Khanty writer Yermey Aipin (second president of RAIPON) and others. "Anxious North" helped the indigenous leaders to organize their first Congress. The group's members were quite interested in the adoption of the Interna-



Photo: RAIPON



Mary Simon (ICC-Canada) and Vladimir Sangi at the Congress in 1990  
Photo: IWGIA archive

tional Labor Organisation's Convention 169, concerning indigenous and tribal peoples in independent countries, and were closely following the drafting of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The scholars from Moscow considered the distribution of international documents among indigenous communities in Russia's northern regions to be an important part of their work. The text of Convention 169, recently adopted by the ILO, was distributed by the group's members at RAIPON's First Congress, and it was there that group members gathered the addresses of delegates and later distributed further documents, articles and materials concerning indigenous peoples to them, as well as publishing letters from regional *obshchinas*.

In February 1990, two indigenous representatives from Russia, Chuner Taksami and Yuri Rytkeu, who had been participating in a UNESCO meeting in Copenhagen, visited the IWGIA secretariat and invited IWGIA to participate in a forthcoming meeting with ICC and the Nordic Sámi Institute. This first indigenous meeting in Russia took place in March 1990 and IWGIA was invited, along with a few Western



Olga Murashko – Photo: Maja Hojer



Vladimir Sangi – Photo: RAIPON



Yeremey Aipin – Photo: RAIPON



Sergey N. Kharuchi, current president of RAIPON – Photo: RAIPON

indigenous NGOs. IWGIA thus had the opportunity of inviting the elected Chair of the organisation “Small Indigenous Peoples of the Soviet North, Siberia and the Far East”, Vladimir Sanghi, to attend the forthcoming meeting of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations in Geneva later that July.

In 1992, members of the group “Anxious North” met for the first time with representatives of IWGIA. Jens Dahl, Inge Larsen and Peter Jessen traveled to Moscow and, from there, set out on a fact-finding trip to western Siberia and Kamchatka. Negotiations for joint work and projects began. The Moscow scholars of “Anxious North” became members of IWGIA, and an IWGIA Moscow local group came into being. Translation and publication of the 1992 IWGIA *Yearbook* was the first joint project between IWGIA and IWGIA-Moscow. This publication remains in popular use among indigenous communities to this day. Russian indigenous peoples realized that they were not alone in their challenges and aspirations. In conversations between indigenous leaders and regional authorities, references are still made to IWGIA *Yearbook* accounts of a protest by American indigenous peoples and how the UN’s reaction to that protest validated the truth of their complaints and the urgency of indigenous peoples’ issues.

Collaboration between IWGIA, IWGIA-Moscow and RAIPON has developed along several lines: publishing and distributing international and Russian documents related to indigenous issues (and, since 2000, publishing RAIPON’s journal *Indigenous World – Living Arctic*), support for indigenous leaders to attend international and national conferences and the sessions of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, discussing developing indigenous parliamentarianism in Russia, conducting educational seminars and creating indigenous regional information centers.

It has taken much time and professional skill to organize RAIPON’s publication work, conduct regional seminars and participate in the development of Russian legislation for indigenous peoples’ rights. Because of this, the author of this note - a participant in the Moscow group - ended up taking on the role of managing the RAIPON information center as well as becoming an official expert representing RAIPON on indigenous issues in the State Duma of the Russian Federation. Today, the other members of “Anxious North” and the IWGIA-Moscow group continue their professional work and periodically participate in seminars and round tables organized by RAIPON, presenting papers analyzing various issues related to the contemporary position of indigenous peoples.

In 2001, IWGIA received funding for the first time from the Danish Foreign Ministry for a project entitled “Capacity Building and Promotion of Human Rights and Legal Mechanisms Concerning Indigenous Peoples in the Russian Federation”, which included three related components. One focused on federal legislation, the second was aimed at supporting indigenous representation in federal, regional and local bodies and the third supported local empowerment projects, which soon developed a special priority and focus on establishing regional information centres. Core support for RAIPON was also included in the programme.

RAIPON’s outreach work, supported through joint projects with IWGIA, is facilitating the increased organizational development of indigenous peoples, the creation of new and independent information centers and timely information-sharing on urgent issues. Information seminars

focus thematically on protecting the rights of indigenous peoples affected by industrial development. Special textbooks on the use of legislation to protect indigenous rights and the negotiations between indigenous organizations and industrial companies are being published. The publication of legal handbooks and the seminars that are organised support the informed participation of indigenous organizations when it comes to protecting their interests, especially in the event of the industrial development of natural resources on their lands. RAIPON's work in this area creates the conditions for a true protection of indigenous rights and for demands to be formulated calling for international principles and regulations in indigenous legislation and the everyday life of indigenous obshchinas to be observed. In so doing, it contributes to enforcing the constitutional obligations of the Russian Federation with regard to the numerically-small indigenous peoples.

Board members of IWGIA and the coordinators of the Russia program in Copenhagen undertake frequent networking and monitoring trips to Russia and participate in seminars and other public events organized by RAIPON, as well as taking part in joint projects with IWGIA and in projects coordinated by regional indigenous organizations supported by IWGIA. □

Olga Murashko

\* The indigenous umbrella organization "Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North" (RAIPON).



*Evdokya Alexandrovna Gayer – Photo: IWGIA archive*

*The first congress of the "Small People of the North", Moscow 1990 – Photo: Jens Dahl*

