

Cree Department of Justice and Correctional Services

The Department of Justice and Correctional Services is a new service under the Cree Regional Authority resulting from a Justice Agreement signed with the Government of Quebec on May 30, 2007.

By way of background, Section 18 of the 1975 James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA) contains specific provisions in respect to the administration of justice by the Cree Nation. Amongst others things, Section 18 provides for the establishment of a judicial district in the region where judges and court workers will have familiarity with the Cree usages and customs. Moreover, it provides for the creation of positions, committees, programs, training and some facilities for programs, and perhaps most importantly, the requirement that the criminal law and its procedures take into consideration Cree circumstances, usages, customs and way of life. The 2007 Justice Agreement includes funding to give effect to Section 18, but also includes other provisions for justice officers and committees, programs for Cree detainees including reintegration support, programs for victims of criminal acts and support for the Judicial Advisory Committee.

The 10-person Judicial Advisory Committee is comprised of five members each from the Cree Nation and the Government of Quebec, selected on the basis of their experience and expertise in justice and correctional services. The Committee is an advisory body that oversees the Department's budget and makes recommendations on it each year to the Cree Nation government and the Government of Quebec, as well as advises on justice system personnel, facilities, research and programs. Members of the Committee sit for three year terms and can be reappointed, with the Chairmanship of the Committee - presently held by Chief Losty Mamianskum - rotating between the Cree Nation and the Government of Quebec.

Fundamental in the Agreements noted above is the requirement that the justice system in Eeyou Istchee reflect the values, beliefs and ways of the people it serves in Cree communities and be responsive to their concerns. This orientation is reflected in our human resources model where Community Justice Officers, Community Reintegration Officers, and Community Justice Panels/Committees will be working in each of the nine communities. This approach ensures we administer justice in a manner that reflects Cree needs and values, at the same time establishing effective programs and services that build and sustain community capacity.

The recent Justice Symposium was an essential first step in achieving a common vision of a responsive and Cree

oriented justice system, integrating federal and provincial laws. A diversity of community representatives and stakeholder groups from across the Cree Nation were brought together to initiate the identification of key justice issues and their possible resolution, a process which was supported by a pre-Symposium justice survey as well as electronic polling at the conclusion of Symposium proceedings. A global plan for crime prevention and reduction in the Cree Nation was presented which incorporates a balanced approach of prevention, intervention, diversion, enforcement, suppression and reintegration, a plan which will guide our work in the coming months. Together, Symposium participants affirmed the need for continued dialogue on justice issues, the value of inter-agency collaboration and the necessity of dealing with the underlying factors fuelling crime and victimization.

Justice facilities contemplated for the Cree Nation will be much more than just courthouses. Rather, they will be the focal point in the community for justice issues, featuring space for mediation, restorative justice, family counselling and other wellness programs. Further, they will have systems in place to increase accessibility to detainees, legal counsel, witnesses and other professionals and justice personnel spread throughout the territory and outside. Regrettably, the costs to build these facilities has increased





dramatically over the past few months making it difficult to build these capital structures all at once without compromising the delivery of needed community services and

programs, new strategies will need to be looked at. With respect to our correctional services program, a regional CRA Correctional Services office was opened in March 2009, in Amos, close to the Amos Detention Centre. Staff at this regional office, with the support of our Community Reintegration Officers, will work with Cree detainees on their rehabilitation during detention and their reintegration after release, so as to reduce the chance of re-offending and improve safety in our communities.

Finally, to help achieve the broad mandate of the Cree Department of Justice and Correctional Services, we have embarked on developing a number of partnerships regionally, provincially and federally. In March, we executed a new agreement with the Province of Quebec and Government of Canada to provide additional funds to support the establishment and training of local justice committees. Moreover, CHRD has supported a range of justice training requirements for new employees and we have submitted a proposal for a Cree detainee reintegration program under a federal government strategic fund for Aboriginal people who face significant employment barriers. We are also in a process of negotiating with the National Crime Prevention Centre to establish an Aboriginal version of the world renowned SNAP™ program for children at risk aged 6 to 12 years who have had police contact or exhibit significant risk factors for criminal offending.

Together, we believe these efforts will ensure that we achieve what we richly deserve: the fair and impartial administration of justice, done so in a manner that honours the traditions, values and aspirations of the people of Eeyou Istchee.

