



March 27, 1996

Mayor
Uriash Puqiqnak
Hamlet of Gjoa Haven

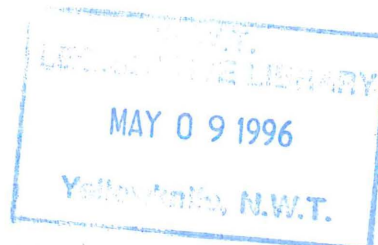
Dear Sir,

We, the Justice Committee of Gjoa Haven, are encouraged about your upcoming meeting with the minister of Justice. We see this as an opportunity to express the concerns of the people of our community. With the movement towards increasing self-sufficiency and community self-government we are hopeful of assuming greater responsibility for justice related issues.

For many years we have been subject to a justice system that has not respected or addressed the concerns of the people in our community. Today we see our people taken out of the community only to come back and get involved with the justice system again. This justice has become an injustice to our people and clearly does not address the problems of those who commit offenses in the community. The system our people are forced to participate in is not very responsive the situation in the communities of our region.

Since our justice committee has been in existence we have had approximately 36 cases brought to us for disposition. Our approach to dealing with our people has been through sentencing that can involve apologizing to the victim, doing community service, spending time with community elders and making restitution. We have had only two instances of recidivism. During this time we have had eighteen of our people incarcerated and sent out of the community. The majority of these people have re-offended. We have seen people come before the western justice system with the same charge, same crime as they committed many times. Clearly court justice is not working for all our people.

Our justice committee feels that Inuit people have been forced to participate in a justice system that does not serve the needs of these very same people. We feel strongly that justice must take into consideration Inuit language, culture and values. Our community requires resources and funding for services such as legal aid, group homes for youth offenders and cultural inclusion centres in an outpost setting. Detention centres in each hamlet or region are also needed. There is also a need for the establishment of a role for elders in a new justice system.



We want to make clear that the western justice system is still necessary but see reform is needed as a result of it's many inadequacies. It is an adversarial system where one person wins and another loses. This system is inefficient because it relies on lawyers who are not from the community and are the only ones who know the legal procedures of this system. In serious matters the western justice system will continue to be necessary. However more referrals are needed to a community-based justice system because it can deal with some problems better than any court can. It is clear that jails are not the answer. We want our people to be on the land, and not in jail, where they can learn how to survive.

Thank you,

Members of the
Gjoa Haven Justice Committee