

JUSTICE INSTITUTE GUYANA

PRESS RELEASE

11TH DECEMBER 2012

GUYANA'S MACUSHI PEOPLES JOIN PARALEGAL SYSTEM

Thirty-five individuals from Macushi communities in Guyana have been trained as paralegals by the Justice Institute Guyana. All have been accepted as paralegals in the recently established national paralegal system. According to Melinda Janki, Director of the Justice Institute,

“The success rate from this training is 100%. You cannot do better than that.”



Participants at the Bina Hill Institute with Melinda Janki, Director of the Justice Institute Guyana.

The first office for the paralegal system was set up in Lethem, a border town, in June 2012. It is expected that the system will be rolled out across Guyana in response to the needs of local communities on the coast as well as in the hinterland.

Sydney Allicock, a Member of Parliament and a highly respected Macushi leader from Surama, welcomed the paralegal system for the Macushi communities of the north Rupununi:

*“For the communities, it [legal training] has always been a missing dimension of proper community planning and development. It is very timely to have the first batch of Paralegals completing the course. ....It is expected that villages will be strengthened by the added personnel who will have a better understanding of what are some of the facts of rules and laws. It is my hope that with the development within the Region the program will continue since it will be one way of giving the village councils a feeling of confidence.”*

Among the trainees were a number of women from the Makushi research unit. They will explain legal issues in the Makushi language which is still used in these communities along with English.



Makushi Research Unit discussing the Amerindian Act with Melinda Janki during the break.

The paralegals will operate from a fully furnished office with access to the laws of Guyana. The office is provided by the Bina Hill Institute, an initiative of the North Rupununi District Development Board, which is a community based organisation. Mike Williams, the Chairman of the NRDDDB, writing to Melinda Janki stated:

*I on behalf of the 16 villages and over 5,000 people would like to thank Justice Institute of Guyana and you for the opportunity given to the people of North Rupununi. The trainees will now have to mobilise and push the system forward. I feel*



*now that we can help the villages minimise negative impacts that the villages now face with the developments coming to the region.”*

All equipment and materials for the office are to be provided by the Ministry of Legal Affairs over the next few weeks. In the meantime participants have been given the Constitution, legislation and other materials to use in their communities.



Ms Indira Ananjit, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Legal Affairs handing over materials to the paralegals from Fairview Village.

The Justice Institute team included Mr Peter Hugh, an expert on criminal law and procedure, as well as Ms Ronella Hill, who is experienced in community training. Also present for part of the training programme was Ms Indira Ananjit Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Legal Affairs and Mr Andre Daziel responsible for the finances for the paralegal project. The paralegal project is part of an overall programme for the Modernisation of the Justice Administration Sector in Guyana located the Ministry of Legal Affairs with financing from the Inter-American Development Bank.