



Kurdiji

'Shield – to protect and discipline'

Lajamanu Law and Justice Group



Superintendent Daniel Bacon
Arnhem & Western Division, Northern Command
Northern Territory Police
PO Box 320
Katherine NT 0851

3 October 2011

Dear Superintendent,

RE: DIVERSION OF PHONES TO DARWIN

We write on behalf of the Lajamanu Law and Justice Group to request that NT Police modify the current practice of automatically diverting all phone calls from remote police stations to the Darwin call centre. This practice means that people in the Lajamanu community are unable to directly contact their local police members.

By way of background, the Lajamanu Law and Justice Group is a group of Senior Men and Women from the Lajamanu community who are actively involved in promoting respect for Law and Justice within their community. It refers to itself as 'Kurdiji', which is a Warlpiri word meaning 'shield'. The shield represents protection of the community, and is also an integral part of the initiation ceremonies in which young men and women are taught respect for the law in order to be fully functioning members of the community.

The Lajamanu Law and Justice Group was established in 1999 as a project of the Aboriginal Law and Justice Strategy (ALJS) under the auspices of Community Corrections. The ALJS was established through the former office of Aboriginal Development. A fundamental strategy of the ALJS was the implementation of Law and Justice Committees. The primary functions of the Law and Justice Committees were:

- To act as an interface with the law and justice systems;
- Pre court conferencing;
- Victim offender conferencing;
- Make recommendations to the Courts as requested;
- Assist with the development and management of community diversion programs;
- Report to Local Councils on law and justice trends and issues; and

- Act as a focal point for community law and justice concerns.¹

The Lajamanu Law and Justice Group was eventually de-funded along with the other law and justice groups in 2005. Following community requests for its reinvigoration, the group reformed in 2010 with the assistance of NAAJA. The group now meets approximately every 6 weeks to discuss community safety issues, and provide crime prevention advice and pre-sentence reports to the court. The Law and Justice Group is routinely involved in informal dispute resolution, with the aim of proactively resolving small conflicts before they turn into larger problems.

The Kurdiji (Lajamanu Law and Justice Group) along with the Lajamanu Night Patrol are concerned by this recent practice of diverting phone calls to Darwin and believe that it leads to significant delays in response time, danger to the community, miscommunication, erosion of the relationship with and confidence in police and a significant under reporting of serious crime.

Both the Kurdiji and Lajamanu Night Patrol cited examples where community members and Night Patrol workers had called Lajamanu police station for assistance and had experienced significant delays. Further we understand there was a recent incident at the Lajamanu health clinic where the transfer of the call to Darwin resulted in a significant delay in the deployment of police. The Kurdiji believe that significant delays in police responses obviously presents increased risk of escalation of incidents with corresponding risks to public safety.

In addition to the danger of delay in police response times, the Kurdijij are also concerned that the unnecessary diversion of phone calls has the capacity to lead to non-reporting of crime. Many community members have expressed great frustration in dealing with telephone operators unfamiliar with Lajamanu people and place names and spending valuable time explaining and identifying places that local police would recognize at first instance. Many community sites and houses are referred to by their colloquial names rather than a street address. Local police are generally aware of these terms. The frustration of the many community members has now led to people not wanting to call police. The potential for under-reporting of crime is a serious concern to the Kurdiji.

The quality of information relayed to police is also compromised by the telephone operators lack of understanding of local names and sensitivities.

¹ The Kurduju Committee Report, Volume 1 December 2001, by the combined communities of Ali-Curung, Lajamanu and Yuendumu Law and Justice Committees.

The Kurdiji are worried that the above issues are eroding community confidence in police and undermining the relationships local police have formed with community members. As previously stated, the Kurdiji would like to have a mutually beneficial working relationship with the local police, and this current practice appears to be a significant impediment in that relationship. If you are not the appropriate person to deal with this request, we would be grateful if you could ensure that this letter is delivered to the appropriate person.

The Kurdiji would appreciate a formal response to this request and would welcome a visit from senior police command on this issue.

We look forward to hearing from you and should you require more information please contact Kurdiji via either Ben Grimes or Will Crawford on 89825100 or ben.grimes@naaja.org.au or will.crawford@naaja.org.au

Yours faithfully,

Kurdiji Members:

Henry Cook Jakamanu
Leslie Roberts Jampijinpa
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