

# Women and Corrections Conference - Keynote Address

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**Presented by**

**Kim Pate, B.A., B.Ed. (P.D.P.P.), LL.B.**

**Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies**

## A. Women in Corrections: The Context; The Challenges

### *Abstract:*

This address will provide an overview of some of the issues and trends related to the context and challenges of working with and on behalf of women prisoners. In addition to exploring the current trends toward the increased criminalization of women, especially poor and racialized women, as well as those classified as having mental and cognitive disabilities, Kim will discuss the historical and global tendency to over-classify women as security risks and the likelihood that they will be kept in high security prison settings, as well as explore the issues related to the increased criminalization of women who experience violence, as part of the backlash response to increased attempts to hold violent men accountable.

Some of the law reform initiatives that have been advocated by equality-seeking women's groups regarding the application to women of self-defence, the defence of provocation, and the mandatory minimum sentence of life imprisonment for murder will also be highlighted. This overview will also examine such issues as the increasing threats of privatization, political interference in correctional and criminal justice matters and the manner in which these factors challenge our abilities to reach behind the walls and welcome women into our, and their, communities.

## 1. Background

First of all, I want to thank the Australian Institute of Criminology and the Department of Corrections for South Australia for sponsoring this conference and the organizers for inviting me here to speak with you this morning. It is both an honour and a privilege, but also somewhat daunting, to have been asked to join you. I had the privilege of meeting with a number of you when I visited almost four years ago, so it is wonderful to be back and to see so many familiar faces. I also look forward to meeting with those of you whom I have not previously had the opportunity to meet.

There are many issues of mutual interest that are international in scope. While I do not propose to provide an exhaustive list, I will attempt to introduce a number of the key challenges that face all of us, albeit to differing extents and degrees. To this end, I will try to provide a bit of an overview of the key issues and challenges facing us, whether we are prisoners, ex-prisoners, prisoner allies, activists, advocates, community-based service providers, correctional officers, administrators, policy makers or legislators.

I will also be focusing this morning on a number of issues that have arisen that are international in scope. I will also touch upon the difficulty of implementing progressive reforms, regardless of how comprehensive and successful are our law and policy reform efforts. We still have a long way to go between policies and practice, especially in most of our women's prisons.

## 2. Context

We enter this century and millennium with the ever-present and persistent challenge of ensuring that women behind prison walls have access to justice. As the economic, social and political climates within our nations and internationally continue to produce ever more daunting challenges to the women with and/or on behalf of whom we work, we too find ourselves struggling at times to remain clear, united, strong and focussed as we are urged to abandon the most difficult issues in favour of self-preservation. Resisting such efforts has and will continue to strengthen our collective voice as well as our commitment to equality and justice for women and girls.

### 3. Increased Criminalization of Women

First of all, I plan to describe the current realities, in terms of the burgeoning numbers of women prisoners. This will include some of our analyses in relation to what is not just a Canadian, but a global trend. I will also provide some concrete examples of the results of such trends in terms of human costs. In the end, I hope we will all be able to discuss how we move forward with more progressive equality and justice agenda.

#### a) Defining the “Trend”

Women prisoners, especially young racialized women prisoners, are the fastest growing prison population world wide. In Canada, for example, we have seen almost a 200% increase in the number of women in prison over the past decade. When the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women tabled its report in 1990 there Most of this increase has occurred in our three Prairie provinces and the four Atlantic provinces, where there have been 300% and 500% increases respectively in the number of women serving prison terms of two years or more, since 1990, when the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women tabled its report entitled, *Creating Choices*.

Aboriginal women account for most of the increase in the Prairies and Black women and women with cognitive and mental disabilities account for the explosion in the east. Although First Nations women account for approximately 1% of the population overall, they are approximately 20% of federally sentenced women. In Canada, correctional jurisdiction is split between the federal and provincial governments based upon the length of a prisoner’s sentence. Prisoners serving two years or more are subject to federal jurisdiction and are therefore referred to as federally sentenced prisoners. Those serving prison sentences of less than two years come under provincial jurisdiction and are therefore referred to a provincially sentenced prisoners.

#### b) Identifying the Factors

The so-called “War on Drugs”, evisceration of health and other social support services, “gender- neutral” zero tolerance policies, and mandatory minimum sentences have contributed significantly to this phenomenon. Furthermore, as we have also witnessed in Canada, too many women prisoners are over-classified in terms of their security risks to the general public. Again, around the world, we are seeing women who have cognitive and/or mental disabilities being more likely to be classified as maximum security prisoners. Many of them were previously institutionalized in psychiatric hospitals and/or involved in other mental health services. Many are criminalized as a result of their disability-induced behaviour in institutions and/or the community.

In Canada, and internationally, we are seeing the feminization and criminalization of poverty. Most single parents are women, the majority of whom live below the poverty line. As social programs have been dismantled, women, especially sole support moms, have been faced with the reality of having to make ends meet within the context of a shrinking social welfare system.

In order to survive and support their families with insufficient resources, many have either worked under the table, prostituted themselves, and, occasionally, some have even carried packages across international

borders for money. Such survival approaches all too often, and increasingly so, have resulted in the criminalization of too many women, for fraud, soliciting for the purposes of prostitution, trafficking and/or importation charges. Think of the comparative savings in terms of both human and fiscal costs if the monies required to jail such women as well as the expenses of state-provided child welfare services and support for their children was invested in their communities, our communities. Such re-investment of ever-shrinking resources would undoubtedly benefit the women who are now being criminalized, as well as their children and many others who are marginalized in their communities; and ultimately, as a result of the resulting community development, all of us collectively.

Another result of funding cutbacks to services over the past decades, has been the obliteration of progressive policy developments to de-institutionalize mentally handicapped and ill has been seriously soured by funding cuts. The result is that we have literally seen these women dumped into the streets and, ultimately, into the wider, deeper and stickier social control net of our criminal justice system. Although the criminal justice system is the likely the least effective and most expensive system that could be used to respond to cognitive and mental disabilities, it is a system that cannot refuse to “service” anyone who is criminalized, regardless of their disability.

Once in prison, the practical reality is that mental health needs have been equated with risk. In Canada, for example, physical and mental disability are included in section 17 of the Regulations of the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act (CCRA)*, as factors which must be considered in determining security classification. This does not mean, however, that the presence of a disability should result in an increased security classification. Mental health concerns that are disabling undoubtedly create very real needs for federally sentenced women and therefore for CSC. But, equating mental and cognitive disabilities with risks only serves to perpetuate a social construction of persons with mental disabilities as dangerous.

Although this is precisely the kind of stereotyping which is prohibited by the equality provisions of the section 15 *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, as I stand before you today, I must regrettably report that for the past 4 1/2 years Canada has isolated most such women in segregated maximum security units in men’s prisons. Most of these women pose the greatest risk to themselves and their own well-being. They are, however, incredibly difficult to “manage” in prison settings, especially if they resist restraint, lock-up, medications et cetera; and, if they slash and carve their bodies, burn themselves, swallow items, try to smash in their own skulls, gouge out their eyes or kill themselves.

The inability of correctional systems to address cognitive challenges and mental health needs and behaviours of women should not be, but has indeed been, used as a reason to classify women as higher security prisoners and to consequently justify harsher treatment of such women. Since such treatment occurs as a result of the cognitive and mental disabilities of such women prisoners, it is clearly discriminatory and, in Canada, contravenes human rights as well as s. 15(1) of our constitutionally enshrined *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

Consequently, it is our view that we must all continue to pursue opportunities to challenge the increased criminalization of women with cognitive and mental disabilities. In addition, we must focus upon the development of community-based services for women. Where we cannot prevent them from being criminalized in the first place, we need to work to have women taken out on passes and/or released into the community so that they may access such services. It would be folly of the most profound and irresponsible proportions to focus on the development of institutionally-based services alone.

### c) Assessing the Impact

As we have unfortunately seen in Canada, with the building of five new women’s prisons, however, particularly in regions which previously exported their women prisoners thousands of kilometres to the centralized Prison for Women in Kingston, not only have we seen an increase in the number of women sentenced to two years or more just because there is now a new prison in the neighbourhood, but we have also seen judges sentencing women to longer prison terms because of the belief that they are more likely to

receive additional treatment there. Women themselves sometimes ask for longer sentences for the same reasons.

The result has been that any mental health services that do exist within the women's prisons are both over-subscribed and unable to meet the needs of the women; and, too many women who really should not be being criminalized in the first place, are being sentenced for treatment. The words of one of our judges perhaps best exemplify this trend when he indicated at the time of sentencing a young woman to custody that, while he would otherwise consider a one year sentence as the maximum penalty he would impose, given the existence of a new women's prison in the region, he decided to sentence her to two years so that she could go there, where he hoped she would "get the treatment she needed".

Similarly, I am reminded of the words in 1995 of the director of a local lock-up. I was meeting with judges, lawyers and mental health professionals to discuss this issue. Ironically, on the day that I was visiting the lock-up with the women involved in our newest Elizabeth Fry society, the provincial government announced that another wing of the local psychiatric hospital was to close. As we all are undoubtedly aware, women have always been over-represented in psychiatric facilities. Prophetically, upon hearing of the closure announcement, the director of the lock up asserted that, "they might as well back up a truck, load all the women up, and bring them here, because this is where they will end up anyway..."

At the national level, we are working on this issue of how best to address the cognitive and mental disabilities of women. Rather than urging the governments to develop resources and services in juvenile and adult prisons, we are focussing upon the need to develop them in the community. We know that at a time when services in the community are being literally wiped out, the results are that women are girls, who have historically been over-represented in the mental health and psychiatric institutions and services, are increasingly being sentenced to jail for treatment. Often judicial language skirts the issue, but in several women's cases, sentencing judges have indicated that they are sentencing women to serve two years in prison with the hope that they will receive the "help they need" in the new federal prisons for women.

Rather than fuel this increasing trend of women being sentenced to "treatment", CAEFS is interested in challenging the provinces to develop appropriate and necessary mental health services in the community.

Finally, our organization and other Canadian equality-seeking women's groups, such as the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF), the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), the National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada (NOIVMWC) and many others are working to counter the increased criminalization of women who experience violence. Part of the backlash to increased attempts to hold violent men accountable has been the application of so-called "gender neutral" zero tolerance policies to cross or counter charge women.

Women are increasingly charged in circumstances where they have called the police in relation to assault and/or threats directed at them by abusive men, especially if they have managed to defend or otherwise react to the violence perpetrated against them. This is especially true for Aboriginal and other racialized women.

The increasing numbers of younger women in the provincial and federal prison systems in Canada are also of particular concern to CAEFS. Unfortunately, unless we resist the calls for more punitive and regressive scapegoating of youth, and, instead, embark upon a public education campaign to inform the public about the excessive penalizing and incarcerating of youth, we are not likely to see much change in the current slide away from justice for young people. Furthermore, it is First Nations/Aboriginal youth who are disproportionately jailed. For eight of the nine most common offences tracked in Canada, youth serve longer prison sentences than do adults. In addition, we jail youth at four times the rate we jail adults, 5-7 times the rate in most states in the U.S., and 15-20 times the rate of most European countries.

To make things worse, young women usually end up being jailed in mixed youth centres. One of the results of this is that there are many incidents of sexual harassment and rape, most of which go unreported. When we conducted some research on young women in custody, we found two rather shocking results. First, we found that many young women do not define what they experience as sexual harassment or rape. Instead, they talk about it being flirting or fooling around, or their “turn in the closet”. Secondly, for those who do identify what they experience as sexual harassment or rape, most claim that they would not report such assaults.

Too many young women described their reluctance to report sexual and non-sexual assaults as being borne out of the fear that the reporting would result in young women being held in more isolated conditions. This fear has been reinforced by experience. Not only are young women and girls often all mixed together, whether they are remanded in custody, or serving a disposition of open or secure custody, they are often isolated and have more limited access to services and programs than their male counterparts.

When a young woman reports a rape; or, as has suddenly ended up impregnated while in custody, the institutional response is rarely to address the issues. Instead, what generally happens is that the young women are subjected to more restrictive and isolated conditions of confinement. This just reinforces the adage that women, especially racialized young women are too few to count. This reality also has important implications for women in prison generally.

As the Amnesty International reports on the situation of male staff in women’s prisons in the United States, the work of the People’s Justice Alliance and Somebody’s Daughter Theatre Company here in Australia, and Madam Justice Arbour’s Commission of Inquiry into Certain Events at the Prison for Women, have amply illustrated, the issue of strip-searching and male staff in women’s prisons is also an on-going issue. This is particularly the case when one considers the disincentives for women to report harassment and sexual assault.

In Canada and the United States, here too, to my knowledge, we are also facing another backlash. Every time women make one step forward, efforts to shove us back downabound. In the are of women’s involvement in the justice system and corrections system, an excellent, albeit odious example of this trend comes in the form of the treatment recieved by a young First Nations woman, diagnosed as suffering from fetal alcohol syndrome, who, in November 1994, became the second woman in Canada to be labelled a dangerous offender and sentenced to an indeterminate sentence.

Although the designation was ultimately overturned on appeal, as a result of that designation, Lisa was classified as a maximum security prisoner and spent 6 ½ years in prison, most of it in segregated maximum security units in two different men’s prisons.

I first met Lisa when she was 12 years old --, she was dragged into secure “treatment”, followed fairly quickly by secure custody. The system was not impressed by her assertive and confident manner. Unlike so many other young women her age, she was clearly a respected and undisputed leader. These qualities are not ones that are generally accepted, much less encouraged or nurtured, in our social control systems -- be they child welfare or criminal justice in orientation. They are seen as particularly unacceptable when embodied by a young woman. Sexism, racism, heterosexism and class biases intersect to provide an incredibly discriminatory lens through which women like Lisa are viewed and judged.

As a result, it did not take long for the adults in authority to label Lisa as a “problem” in need of “correction”. Once the labels were applied, they not only stuck, but they also attracted other labels which built upon and expanded those prior. Consequently, Lisa started as “mischievous”, “a brat”, then she was called an instigator, negative, and eventually, aggressive, sociopathic and then a dangerous offender. Largely based upon accounts of her institutional behaviour in young offender centres, as well as her “unfeminine” renegade behaviour while working the street, Lisa was characterized as the most dangerous woman in Canada by Justice Murray in 1994 and then as a maximum security prisoner by the Correctional Service of Canada for more than four years.

Including her pre-trial detention, Lisa spent approximately six years in jail for an offence which the Court of Appeal eventually determined warranted a three year sentence, as opposed to the indeterminate one that had been imposed. To make matters worse, she also spent most of her time living in some of the most severe and limiting prison conditions in Canada. Nobody should ever have to face the sort of tortuous ordeal that Lisa was forced to endure.

Our hope was that the Court of Appeal's decision would result in broader systemic changes to the administration of justice for women across Canada. But, although the court challenged such sexist interpretations of the law as the acceptance in the lower courts of a psychological assessment of Lisa that "effectively implies ... that a woman's thoughts about murder can somehow be equated with a man's commission of a murder...", it stopped short of calling for the much needed broader systemic reforms that Lisa's case exemplified.

The court did note, however, the typical nature of this young woman's "violent" offences, in that "every offence which Neve committed was entangled in some way with her life as a prostitute." They also pointed out that while it was not to be condoned, Lisa's violent offences were generally characterized as attempts to avenge wrongs done to others. Furthermore, they characterized Lisa as "a young woman with a relatively short criminal record for violence, [who was] disposed to telling shocking stories of violence."

Finally, in determining if and when the dangerous offender provisions should apply, the Court of Appeal determined that, "the question is whether, relatively speaking compared to all other offenders in Canada - male and female, young and old, advantaged and disadvantaged - Neve falls into that small group of offenders clustered at or near the extreme end of offenders in this country." They also found that Lisa Neve did not fit into that group at all.

Within two days, Lisa went from facing the rest of her life in prison to being released from prison. Uncharacteristic of most young Aboriginal people adopted out to white families at birth, Lisa's adoptive family remains extremely supportive and Lisa is working hard to overcome the impact of her imprisonment and plans for the future. The biggest danger for Lisa remains, however, the reaction of others to her infamous dangerous offender label.

As you do here in Australia, we have many other tragic examples of the targeting and isolation of Aboriginal women, who once criminalized, live in virtual isolation in segregated and isolating conditions in maximum security units.

#### 4. Messes Manufactured by Mandatory Minimum Sentences

Internationally, there have been many campaigns and cases aimed at reforming the defence of self-defence to reflect the realities experienced by battered women who defend themselves and others with lethal force. After the Supreme Court of Canada handed down the *Lavallee* decision in 1990, CAEFS and other equality-seeking women's groups requested a review of the cases of women who had been jailed for killing their abusers.

These efforts resulted in the establishment of the Self-Defence Review. The purpose of the Review was essentially to examine the cases of women jailed as a result of their involvement in the deaths of their abusers and recommend how they might achieve some measure of justice for women who had been convicted in Canada of homicide in circumstances where self-defence should have been considered.

CAEFS has also been involved in national consultations with women's groups on violence against women, and has articulated the link between women's experience of male violence and their subsequent convictions and imprisonment. In this regard, CAEFS participated in 1995, along with other women's groups, in responding to the White Paper proposals in 1993 and in discussions regarding proposals for reform of the law of self-defence in 1995.

In 1998, the federal government released its latest consultation document on the reform of self-defence, *Reforming Criminal Code Defences: Provocation, Self-Defence and Defence of Property*, which included proposed reforms to the defence of provocation and defence of property as well. In the summer of 1999, CAEFS convened a national consultation with equality-seeking women's groups to discuss the relationship between self-defence, the defence of provocation, and the mandatory minimum sentence of life imprisonment for murder.

CAEFS' primary and most critical response to the Department of Justice paper, *Reforming Criminal Code Defences: Provocation, Self-Defence and Defence of Property* is to urge the abolition of the mandatory minimum sentence of life imprisonment. CAEFS has, since 1979, formally opposed all mandatory minimum sentences, as have many other government commissions such as the Sentencing Commission of Canada. Given the extremely serious repercussions of the mandatory minimum sentence of life imprisonment for individual women convicted of murder and for the conditions in women's prisons, CAEFS calls for abolition of this and all other mandatory prison sentences.

First and foremost, the abolition of mandatory minimum sentences is necessary if we are to address systemic discrimination in the criminalization and imprisonment of women, members of racialized communities, people with disabilities, the poor, and lesbians and gays. While some people seem to believe that mandatory minimum sentencing amounts to "equal treatment", this assumption is falsely simplistic.

Mandatory sentencing could only be said to be "equal treatment" if everyone had an equal chance at receiving a mandatory sentence. Everyone does not have an equal chance at receiving a mandatory prison sentence for a number of reasons. Disparity is partly created by the choice of offences that are targeted for mandatory minimums -- usually the offences disparately committed by the socio-economic underclass of society.

Further, as has been demonstrated over and over again by activists, researchers, and advocates, Aboriginal people, other racialized people, and poor people face a criminal justice system in which discretion is exercised to their disadvantage at every turn, from the investigatory and charge stage by police, to the prosecutorial decisions made by Crown attorneys, to the trial and sentence decisions by judges, to the penal practices, including discipline of prison authorities, through to the parole determinations made by the parole board.

There are also significant numbers of people with cognitive and psychiatric disabilities who are caught up in the criminal justice system, and for whom stereotypes and discriminatory practices play a role in their conviction and exposure to mandatory sentences of incarceration. Moreover, the available evidence indicates a Crown preference for first degree murder charges against women who kill their mates, when either no charges or a manslaughter charge would be warranted on all the evidence.

Given the reality that most women who use lethal force to prevent an attack by an abusive partner are also the first to notify police of the death and their involvement, their own actions are frequently used by Crown prosecutors as the basis for laying first degree murder charges. It is neither logical nor just to allow the gendered context that gives rise to the decision to lay first degree murder charges against such women to dictate a minimum sentence of life imprisonment.

Cognitive and psychiatric disabilities also generally weigh against an accused in the prison classification process and correctional programming, not to mention the availability of parole. Not surprisingly, in jurisdictions that have attempted to gauge the impact of mandatory sentencing laws, the results indicate consistently that minority groups are the ones targeted by these laws.

Women who allege that they killed violent mates face widespread disbelief and misogynist denial, an enormous lack of legal, social, and economic support for their defence, and the prospect of loss of their children for decades. Added to this is the loss of self-worth, confidence, and clarity engendered by male control and violence. Thus, women are systemically disadvantaged when charged with first degree murder

in their ability to fight the charge based on self-defence, as a direct consequence of the mandatory life sentence that is tied to a murder conviction. The overwhelming trend in such cases is for the woman to agree to plead guilty to manslaughter in order to open up the possibility of judicial as opposed to mandatory sentencing.

Mandatory sentencing also produces unequal results, even if it could be called equal treatment, because it forces a judge to impose a set sentence regardless of mitigating circumstances. For women and other disempowered groups, this results in ignoring systemic oppressions that assist in creating “criminals”, and it even overrides individual responsibility. For example, some women who killed violent mates and plead guilty to manslaughter had, after *Lavallee* (1990) received suspended sentences and/or community sentences on the basis that they had been battered and that the battering was relevant to their moral culpability.

Long prison terms may have more devastating effects upon prisoners who are racialized or who experience cognitive or psychiatric disabilities, whose prospects of employment will be further crushed by a record of imprisonment. In the case of women, they are more likely to be the primary, often sole parent of children and therefore more likely to experience the loss of their children and the anxiety related to concerns about their well-being. Further, the conditions of women’s imprisonment have often been condemned for their failure to provide appropriate services for women.

Mandatory minimum sentences also contribute to systemic discrimination by putting pressure on lawyers to resort to extraordinary measures to avoid conviction and the mandatory sentence for their clients. Many of the problems that have been associated with the defences of self-defence and provocation are in fact distortions caused by the existence of a mandatory minimum sentence of life imprisonment for murder. Accused persons, lawyers, and judges are pressured to resort to constructs such as “Battered Woman Syndrome”, “Homosexual Advance”, “Homosexual Panic”, “Cultural Defences”, and “Rage” in order to avoid this sentence, even when such uses carry negative social policy consequences and in fact violate the rights of the deceased victims and social groups such as women, lesbians and gays, and racialized people. The more appropriate response is to rid the law of the mandatory minimum sentence of life for murder.

## 5. Challenging Stereotypes and Encouraging Proactive Action

We need to strategize and collaborate to organize public events to enhance public awareness and education regarding the circumstances of women involved in the criminal justice system. We must challenge and gradually break down the negative stereotypes that exist about women who come into conflict with the law.

In Canada, we have National Elizabeth Fry Week, which is always the week preceding Mother's Day. The majority of women who come into conflict with the law are mothers. Most of them were the sole supporters of their families at the time they were incarcerated. When mothers are sentenced to prison, their children are sentenced to separation. We try to draw attention to this reality by ending Elizabeth Fry Week on Mother's Day each year.

By focusing on initiatives to keep women in the community and facilitate their integration after prison, our 24 member societies strive to encourage the Canadian public to examine some productive and responsible means of encouraging community responses to addressing criminal justice matters from coast to coast. Particularly in this time of fiscal restraint, our aim is to retain a proactive focus in order to encourage the development of, and support for, community-based alternatives to human and fiscal expenses of our increasing reliance on incarceration. We focus on increasing public awareness of the myriad issues facing women in prison and gradually break down the stereotypes of women in conflict with the law. In addition, we initiate and respond to media awareness and coverage of the myriad relevant issues on an ongoing basis.

## 6. The Challenges of Economic, Social and Political Forces

Throughout the world, we are seeing a backlash against women's progress. In Canada, we will have our federal election on November 27th, at which time we face the prospect of a government comprised of vicious little misogynist white supremacists. Just recently, we had several tastes of their tactics.

One incident involved the highest profile woman prisoner that we have in Canada -- a woman who, with her husband, was involved in the sexual torture and killing of three young women, one of whom was the woman's 14 year old sister. Understandably public revulsion was and remains great. The victims were middle class white women. The significance of this is no doubt obvious to all. In Canada, we have also experienced significant state-funded and seemingly state-sanctioned abuses of power, particularly by the police who cry for regressive criminal justice responses fueled by their own bungling of two of the highest profile cases in recent history (past two decades -- Olson and Bernardo). The results have been media and political circuses that have resulted in longer and more punitive carceral sanctions.

Yet, although we are in this time of right wing sentiments and neo-conservative social, economic and political war on the poor, women, children, racialized -- and especially those who are criminalized, we also have courageous women like yourselves who are challenging the status quo.

We all need to continue to challenge each other to reach behind the walls and welcome women into our, and their, communities, so that they may take responsibility and account for their actions in ways that enhance our international, national, and local commitment and adherence to fundamental principles of equality and justice.

## 7. The Future

But then there is the future.

Now is not the time to compromise our values, our principles or beliefs. If we do, we will be the easiest to steam roll over --- when we don't, we will stand strong, united with our sisters and brothers in the demands for equality, our wall of solidarity may get alternately picked at, rammed and an occasional brick may be wiggled loose and removed, but if the mortar of our values, our beliefs, our principles, is strong, we will stand for a very long time and will have a greater likelihood of protecting our children and grandchildren and their children and grandchildren from the forces that stand poised ready for almost certain attack.

As a lifer named Gayle Horii often reminds me, "There is strength in SISTERhood." In fact, the first time I met Gayle, she introduced me to a quote which, for me, summarizes our "raison d'être". Accordingly, I will close with the words of an Australian Aboriginal woman, named Lilla Watson:

**If you have come here to help me,  
You are wasting your time.  
If you have come here because  
your liberation is bound up with mine,  
Than let us work together.**

Thank you.

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## 2. Plenary Presentation - Women in Prisons: The Canadian Experience

In this presentation, the situation of women prisoners in Canada will be examined. In addition to providing an overview of the successes and challenges faced by women prisoners, advocates and correctional services

as they have attempted to work together in Canada to develop a new framework for addressing issues pertaining to women offending, Kim will highlight the results of the unique vision and contributions of the First Nations women who have worked to try to counter the condition of institutionalization that colonization has visited upon their people. This presentation will identify legislative, policy and programming initiatives and reforms that have been part of Canada's experience with women's imprisonment, with particular focus upon two significant reports, the Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, sub-titled, *Creating Choices*, and the Report of Madam Justice Louise Arbour following her *Commission of Inquiry into Certain Events at the Prison for Women in Kingston*. Community based options available to and for women in Canada, as well as some of the current challenges faced by young women who come into conflict with the law in Canada, and the increasing push for regressive law reform will also be highlighted.