



Strength In SiSterhood (SIS) Society

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SIS was incorporated in 1995 –a networking avenue for federally sentenced women (FSW). Encouraged and supported by many, in particular by Dr. Karlene Faith, SFU, by Kim Pate, LLB, MA Ed., Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS), by June Callwood, author and humanitarian and by Des Turner, MA Eng., the SIS membership includes national representation from many women's organizations alongside formerly incarcerated FSW.

Though the stories and the history of the brutalization of FSW throughout the years since the 1938 opening of Kingston's Prison for Women (P4W) in Ontario are too numerous to recount here, we ask that you revisit this context from time-to-time, while considering the current Canadian Human Rights complaint filed by CAEFS with regard to the systemic discrimination suffered by FSW. You might then be better able to understand why **SIS** calls each new facility a P4W, albeit the Edmonton P4W (EP4W), etc.

Maximum Security

“Most importantly, the risks that they [women] pose to the public, as a group, is minimal, and at that, considerably different from the security risk posed by men (Arbour.1996:228).”

In February, 1995, most of you will recall those black eyes crammed with horror and the piercing, defenseless pleas of our SiSters inside P4W as their naked bodies were exposed by helmeted, baton-wielding, male members of the emergency response team (ERT) from the men's Kingston Penitentiary - as they ripped or cut away the few, thin pieces of clothing from these young women - on the concrete floors of segregation cells, April 27, 1994.

The Correctional Service of Canada's (CSCs) video tapes, nationally televised by the CBC's FIFTH Estate in Feb.1995 provided eye witness to these egregious sexual assaults, claims that otherwise might be doubtful since the conduct was touted by the CSC as “professional.” The resulting public outcry forced the then Solicitor General, Herb Gray, to call an immediate Commission of Inquiry. The resulting April, 1996 Report by the Honourable Justice Louise Arbour prompted the resignation of the then, Commissioner of Corrections, John Edwards (since promoted).

While CAEFS and other national women's organizations supported Justice Arbour's 14 recommendations, the Government of Canada (Canada) and the CSC **did not** (with the exception of parts of those recommendations that could enlarge the correctional budget and enable other self-serving interests).

Imagine your reactions if you were just one Aboriginal woman, incarcerated **since 1978** when - after suffering these assaults by uniformed men, in **1994** you are transferred to a men's penitentiary in Sask. Termed “therapy,” you manage to ‘survive’ another **MORE than EIGHT YEARS** under segregated conditions until transferred in March, 2003 to one of the “new”



maximum security units for women. Here, you are denied all rehabilitation-relevant programs including your own rights under s.15 of the 1985 Charter enactment and the 1992 CCRA, which includes the right to full participation in all Aboriginal spirituality. You must complete the mandatory correctional “programming;” you must agree to be handcuffed and shackled and while accompanied by 2 officers, be degraded and be **used** to instill fear and from that fear - compliance throughout the rest of the population –all in order to gain a few hours in the gym while the other women are barred from that same gym and locked down during this movement!!! You are expected to show respect to your keepers throughout this ordeal.

Is this a case for Justice Arbour’s proposed model that would have included the provision:

If illegalities, gross mismanagement or unfairness in the administration of a sentence renders the sentence harsher than that imposed by the court, a reduction of the period of imprisonment may be granted, such as to reflect the fact that the punishment administered was more punitive than the one intended (Arbour 1996:183). ?

If you had time to review the **1988** recommendations made by the then Chairman of the Standing Committee on Justice and Solicitor General, David Daubney, you would find that in **2003**, FSW are still suffering parallel forms of injustice.

The Committee is concerned that large numbers of women prisoners across the country are being detained in facilities which provide much higher security than most of them require and than most of them would be subjected to if they were men...(1988:233).

From that report, Taking Responsibility you could note the many recommendations made specifically concerning FSW with their conclusions#96-97 directed to the Solicitor General to “convene a Task Force on Federal Female Offenders (1988:268).” The Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women (TFFSW) was then convened in 1989.

The April, 1990 TFFSW Report, Creating Choices, reiterated the CSC’s needless and excessive use of the maximum security classification of FSW along with the harsh conditions under which they endured.

The TF also followed through with recommendations #91-94 for immediate Community options (1988:231) following Daubney’s conclusion that:

In the Committee’s opinion, appropriate residential facilities for **female offenders** are crucial to reduce Canada’s reliance on imprisonment and to ensure **equality** of services and opportunities to all offenders.ⁱ

Lack of Community Options

Yet, in 2003 the only minimum-security prison for women (Isabel McNeil House) will soon be closed. Though 41.56% of FSW are classified as minimum security, the new “multi-level” P4Ws provide no recognition of their low security requirements whereas 20.76% of the federally sentenced men (FSM) have their “status” recognized with 34 minimum-security penitentiaries and 17 community correctional centers!

The Task Force members considered the plan of Creating Choices as a “single recommendation” and **“to ensure that it remains true to our touchstone, it is a plan which must be seen, assessed and implemented in its entirety. Isolating parts of the plan, and adopting or**



rejecting these parts without seeing their vital interrelationship to the whole, would “destroy the integrity of the plan” (1990:137). The CSC HAVE purposefully and effectively destroyed the plan.

The CSC easily accomplished the secretive and biased selection of sites for the 4 new regional P4Ws. Add to that the bastardization of the model envisioned by the TFFSW- by ignoring the needs of women and children in favour of enhanced security/ maximum security, by utilizing a ‘green space’ instead of full tracks and recreational fields, by erecting fences and other security devices like perimeter intrusion devices (PIDs), by taking over the operation of the Okimaw Ochi Healing Lodge with all correctional personnel, by shutting out agencies like CAEFS their input and their much needed presence during the ‘implementation phase,” by refusing to build enough private family cottages so that every woman could achieve the benefits of a private family visit as per the allowances for FSM and you have a few examples of the purposes of the CSC. More security=more security personnel=bigger budget.

With a **1.5 billion-plus dollar budget** annually and when audited only every five years, the CSC does what they do knowing that they can get away with it. There is absolutely no accountability since they do not require an Annual General Report, rather their highly paid PR managers assuage the public with glossy printed brochures like “Basic Facts.” These ‘Facts’ quote the annual cost per prisoner **without** including staff training and regional offices in five regions, national headquarters (including PR) or capital costs (additions, mistakes, rebuilding, building). The numerous, unresolved grievances by prisoners are listed in the Annual General Report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator, however he is not mandated to report to Parliament and nor is the CSC mandated to act on his recommendations.

We most wholeheartedly agree with the many assessments and recommendations of CAEFS. The in-depth comprehension of this organization with regard to all matters affecting FSW is unequalled. The long hours of extensive work throughout these most difficult past 14 years in the recorded history of FSW are personal and often painful and exhaustive endeavors far beyond what has ever before been attempted and/or even contemplated. The CAEFS Executive Director, Kim Pate has energized, formulated and mentored these efforts steering through the pitfalls and traps laid before her with intellectual, moral and spiritual brilliance. Her infinite expertise cannot be matched and nor should anyone attempt to undermine her efforts for she has proven her stalwart opposition to tyranny and corruption, time and time again.

We offer our sincerest gratitude to Kim, to all of the national women’s equality seeking organizations and to the Canadian Human Rights Commission. With respect and In the gentleness of SISTERhood, Gayle K. Horii, SIS Coordinator