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## Women & Girls in Prison: Australia's Alternative to Equality & Justice

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Presented by

Debbie Kilroy, B.SocWk, LL.B., GDip ForMH

Chief Executive Officer of Sisters Inside

The Departments of Anthropology, Archaeology & Sociology, and Social Work & Community Welfare and Centre for Women's Studies from the School of Arts & Social Sciences present this important public lecture.

### **Abstract**

Women are the fastest growing prison population worldwide. Recent global trends are seeing the increased criminalisation of women and girls, especially those who are poor, abused and racialized. The factors that are contributing to women and girls being characterized as becoming more violent will be explored.

By looking at the issues through the perspectives of those with the lived experiences, Debbie will focus attention upon the nature and circumstances under which women are criminalized.

She will also encourage others to examine their own perspectives as to the manner in which women should be dealt with by the criminal justice system. Debbie will also discuss a local perspective that will include issues that criminalised Aboriginal women experience in North Queensland.

Before I begin my comments, I want to acknowledge and thank the traditional custodians of this land on which we gather today. As a non-Indigenous woman who lives on Nuloopul land and has the privilege and responsibility of walking with many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

women, men and young people, I consider it a duty to name the negative impact of colonization on all of us – for we see the consequences in very stark and profound ways when we enter our prisons and see firsthand the over-representation of Aboriginal men, boys, girls, and women. Aboriginal women represent more than one third (34%) of women serving sentences in this country and more than 60, 70 80%, even 90%, in some of our youth and adult prisons. Here in Townsville 80% of women in prison are Indigenous and over 90% of them can't read or write.

These numbers reveal a great deal not just about the lives of Indigenous people in this region but about our attitudes as a state and a nation to Indigenous people and to our own position in this country. I'd like you to keep those numbers at the forefront of your minds tonight as we take a closer look an appalling situation.

First though, I'd like to thank JCU for inviting me here to speak with you tonight.

Tonight as I speak I want you to imagine what women in prison have been doing today and what they are doing now. The majority would now be locked down in their concrete cells –

Alone –

Isolated –

Distressed –

Missing their children and Family

If they have been 'privileged' today they may have had a family member or friend or their children visit them – they would have been able to touch their faces, stroke their hair, hug them tight, kiss them tenderly on the cheeks – having that special moment that we all here can have daily.

At what cost though – after their visit they would have been taken into an area where they would have been strip searched – let me clarify that – across Australian jurisdictions it is called a dignified strip search – what does that mean you may be thinking - top half of your clothes off, lift your breasts, flick your hair, hold your arms above your head and turn around, then put your bra back on, now remove the bottom half of your clothing, turn raise your feet, squat, spread your cheeks and cough, if you are menstruating remove your tampon or pad and hand it to the prison officer – this is what a dignified strip search is and how many women paid today for a visit from their children, family and friends.

For those whose behaviour was not favourable to prison staff today – the women who are not well and have mental health concerns, those who get distressed, the women, particularly Aboriginal women here in

North Queensland with acquired brain damage due to the violence perpetrated against them – they were probably left in isolation and who didn't have a visit or attend a program or go to industry – they were probably hand cuffed and body belted and medically restrained – left in a suicide gown in isolation wondering what is happening to them, thinking of their children, family, and friends. Knowing that they cannot touch them, speak to them as we all have been able to today.

As we have the privilege to come to JCU tonight and participate in this lecture, as we leave and decide what we are going to eat for dinner and if we are going to socialise tonight with family and friends I ask you to remember all of these women now as I speak.

Right now I am remembering Fyodo Dostoyevsky who in 1861 said –  
“The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons.”

It is little wonder that his book was entitled **The House of the Dead**.

This lecture tonight has come at an amazing time really, considering our services for criminalised women and children in North Queensland were defunded by the new LNP government over a week ago. It's a very sad time for us all. And I'd also like to thank all our supporters with the campaign to retain this crucial funding or to have it reinstated. The

Getup organisation has come on board with a petition, along with various other media organisations and thousands of ordinary Queenslanders, proving that not all decisions made by this new government represent everyone. In many areas they may not represent many people at all.

I say this because even I was surprised at the public response to this funding cut. One sure thing we know at Sisters is that prison issues are not vote catchers, and they barely enter the consciousness of most people day to day. But lots of people, it seems, know an outrageous and heartless decision when they see it. Lots of people, it seems, understand it when we say that this particular decision removed a crucial service from the poorest and the most disadvantaged group of women in the state - removed a tiny amount of funding from women who already had next to nothing. It took away something that actually made a regular and material difference to shattered lives. Even people safely ensconced in rich and middle-class suburbs in faraway Brisbane got that, as the growing number of signatures on the GetUp site reveals.

It also shows that people understand this: that most women in prison pose the greatest risk to themselves, not others. I will talk more about that and about the programs Sisters *used to run* in Townsville shortly.

This year Sisters Inside celebrates 20 years of support for and with criminalised women. Twenty years ago I was released from prison and, together with women still in prison, set out to establish an organisation that would be run by and for criminalised women. Our aims then are our aims now: to walk with women. For us this means providing necessary and baseline services like domestic violence and sexual abuse counselling, and programs that support women and their children, but just as much it means running an agenda that is *the women's* agenda, and advocating loudly and energetically for their human rights. For us it is all about *agency*.

The organisation that is Sisters Inside was always against the odds. As I said, these issues are not vote catchers, and rarely catch the imagination of the general public. We were and are a non-government organisation of women most often seen as 'the other', that is women most people would say they had little in common with. Women who had broken the law. Lived in the underbelly of society, though often not by choice. As you would all know, deprivation and poverty and abuse don't make nice page three pictures for newspapers and they're hidden away – as prisons are these days – in mostly fringe suburbs and remote communities where people don't have to encounter them every day.

These are the heartlands of Sisters Inside.

Despite this Sisters Inside has managed to capture the attention – frequently in controversial ways – of various governments of various colours in the past twenty years, and though we haven't won every fight we've picked we've won enough to ensure crucial services are provided to criminalised women and that people know about them and about their needs. The GetUp campaign is an indicator of that. And so is the impact of many of our programs like the one operating in Brisbane's Special Circumstances Court, where our success rate in keeping women *out of* prison is 96% percent. **EXPLAIN THE COURT**

But in Sisters Inside scheme of things, this is nowhere near enough. Our programs are making inroads, yes, but until governments take notice and acknowledge the need – until they stop removing crucial funding - we will be left with a world in which only some people have human rights. In which some people aren't even aware of what human rights are and certainly don't think they pertain to *them*. Most women in prison – and I'd say just about all the women in Townsville prison – assume human rights are for other people. NOT FOR THEM – some women ask what are human rights.

You will all be familiar with the reasons for this. When you have grown up in poverty and deprivation or abuse, when that is what you know, when you have been incarcerated more than you have been in school,

when your sense of self is largely non-existent and your sense of shame bigger than you are, you might barely feel human yourself. So the notion of *human rights* might well, you think, be for others and not for you.

We know that all women still do not enjoy equality - certainly too many women in prison do not even know that they are supposed to have equal protection and access to the law and equality.

These women are criminalised because they defend themselves against violent partners, because they defraud the commonwealth because they can't feed their children, because they self medicate with illegal drugs after years of sexual and physical abuse. The abuse inflicted on women and living in poverty ensures that women end up in prison.

## WHY

Media reports on these so called crimes and they are framed as violent offence, fraud drug addicts, politicians jump on the band wagon to try and ensure votes by spreading fear through our communities. Prisons are framed to make us think and believe that we **feel comfortable in our beds at night, and make us happy in the knowledge that we are the deserving ones.**

We all must act to interfere with and fight these draconian, destructive and -- we argue -- illegal practices. These approaches are not only criminalizing the poor, but are sentencing them to destruction. We say there is a war against the most dispossessed, especially the poor in this country. We need to push for the development of resources for women in the community and not to criminalise them because they are poor, abused and drug and or alcohol addicted and Aboriginal.

Increasingly, we are seeing a direct relationship between such policies and the increased criminalization of the most marginalized, especially young, racialized and poor women ...

At Sisters we see some of the worst examples of the increasing trends to criminalize women and girls and especially Indigenous women.

Aboriginal women continue to suffer the shameful and devastating impact of colonization. From mission and residential school, to child welfare seizure, to juvenile and adult imprisonment; Aboriginal women and girls are vastly over-represented in institutions and prisons under state control.

Indeed, even as we work to deinstitutionalize and decarcerate, we are fearful that "treatment" will be the next colonial control of choice. Indeed,

we are already seeing this, as exemplified by what is happening with pregnant women.

The focus on fetal alcohol spectrum syndromes and disorders are gendered, classed and racist in approach and we must venture forth very carefully.

Why? Consider for a moment the reality that such alphabet soup diagnoses of FAS, FAE, FASD, ARND [alcohol-related neurological disorders] et cetera, are most prevalent in countries that have high rates of criminalized Indigenous populations. Even though the lists of symptoms or characteristics of foetal alcohol labels overlap significantly with other conditions ranging from inadequate nutrition, oxygen deprivation, learning disabilities, attention deficit, et cetera, the labels are persistently utilized in places such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States. It is not coincidental that these are also countries with high rates of criminalization of racialized Indigenous peoples.

In the European Union, on the other hand, this approach is not seen as particularly helpful – they consider the symptoms and impact of other toxins, be they pollution, bad water, insufficient nutrients, lack of prenatal and postnatal supports, accidental brain injuries, lack of oxygen, et

cetera, as equally important. After all, despite the rhetoric that it is 100% preventable, and since many women do not know they are pregnant before the apparently crucial day 17 of gestation, the only way to make these syndromes preventable would be to prohibit the consumption of alcohol by all women of child-bearing age.

Moreover, since we don't really know what the impact of alcohol is on male sperm, then likely it should also be illegal for men to drink too. Obviously, we all want to limit the impact of alcohol and other toxins on foetal development, but we know that criminalizing behaviour is only likely to end up with a focus on those least able to defend themselves against it. Current access to justice being what it is, a focus on fetal alcohol exposure, in isolation, is likely to continue to result in the disproportionate application of the law and societal judgment against poor and racialized women.

How many fewer diagnoses of FASD (fetal alcohol spectrum disorders), et cetera would there be if that label meant that the recipients could not be relegated to the most isolating prison conditions? If such a label meant that someone could not be criminalized but must be found to be in need of community supports because their disability renders them incapable of forming criminal intent? We predict that the diagnoses

might virtually evaporate. Courageous jurists, like Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond (as she then was) and is a Canadian have tried to take on this issue in individual cases. We applaud and encourage such efforts and continue to push for broader, systemic change. We look forward to legal challenging the cases here in Queensland.

This is what I believe: It is no accident who is criminalized, nor who is imprisoned; and, nor is it an accident who is not. What if, instead of denying and defending abuse of power and force by police and prison personnel, as well as the neglect and abuse of institutionalized persons, we collectively condemned and stopped such practices. What if we went back even further and, radically, have every child a truly equal start in life, in education, in health, in opportunity? I wonder what our prison populations would look like then.

The reality is, however, that in Australia that population continues to grow, and that the fastest growing prison population worldwide is women, and in particular, racialized, young and poor women. In Townsville most of the women are Aboriginal, and they represent the majority of the women's prison population. We know the increasing numbers of women in prison is clearly linked to the evisceration of health, education and social services. We also know that the cycle intensifies in times of economic downturn. It is very clear where we are

sending the people who are experiencing the worst in the downturn in the economy and social trends. Prisons are our most comprehensive homelessness and mental health initiative.

The result has been that women prisoners in Australia, like women prisoners worldwide, are the fastest growing prison population.

We also know that increased numbers of young women with mental and cognitive disabilities, women who used to fill psychiatric and mental health facilities, are now increasingly being criminalized. Progressive trends of the past to de-institutionalize those with cognitive and mental disabilities have been subverted by shocking cuts to funding, attitudes and policies of the last decade. The result is that more and more people are literally being dumped into the streets.

Their attempts to survive, their attempts to self-medicate, their attempts to cope as well as the behaviour that then evolves from being increasingly disenfranchised, have led to their increased criminalization and imprisonment.

Once in prison, these women are considered difficult to manage and consequently spend a disproportionate amount of their time classified as maximum-security. This means that in addition to serving most of their sentence in the segregated maximum-security units, they are also most

likely to be placed in segregation. They also tend to attract a number of psychiatric labels, and to be characterized by correctional services as being some of the most difficult prisoners to manage.

On Monday I received a telephone call from a lawyer who was very concerned that one of the Aboriginal women in BWCC who has been labelled as a management problem and has been locked in isolation for some months will now be transferred to TWCC on Friday.

The reflex of corrections to develop mental health service in prisons only serves to exacerbate the trend to increasingly criminalize women with mental and cognitive disabilities. Developing such services in prisons at a time when they are increasingly non-existent in the community is devastating: it results in more women receiving prison sentences or remanded in custody because there is a presumption that there is an ability to access services in prison that are not available in community settings. Prisons are not and cannot be treatment centres. Prisons cannot be the mental health alternative.

Prisons are not an alternative for anything or anyone. It is heartbreaking when Indigenous women in Queensland, for instance, and from communities in north Queensland, tell me that prison is okay for them

because they feel safer there than in their communities. This is a shocking indictment on our country and on non-Indigenous complicity with the hellish lives often lived in these places.

### Particular Problems for Young Women and Girls

The increasing numbers of younger women in the prison system are of particular concern to Sisters Inside. Unfortunately, unless we resist the calls for more punitive and regressive scapegoating of Queensland youth, we are not likely to see much change in the current slide away from justice for young people. Instead we must embark on a public education campaign to inform Queenslanders of the excessive penalties and incarceration rates among the youth of their state.

We are the only jurisdiction in this country to lock up 17 year old young people in the adult prison system. Furthermore, it is Aboriginal youth who are disproportionately jailed in youth prisons and transferred to adult jails.

To make things worse, young women usually end up being jailed in mixed youth centres. Although they are supposed to be kept separate inside the prison walls the young people are brought together for

programs and education. One of the results of this is that there are incidents of sexual harassment and rape, most of which go unreported.

When CAEFS (**explain CAEFS briefly**) conducted some research on young women in custody, they found two rather shocking results. First, they 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 say they would not report such assaults.

Too many young women described their reluctance to report sexual and non-sexual assaults as being born from the fear that they and other young women would then be held in more isolated conditions. This fear has been reinforced by experience. Not only are young women and girls often mixed together, whether they are remanded in custody, or serving a sentence, 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 has been impregnated while in custody, the institutional response is rarely to address the issues. Instead, what generally happens is that the young woman is subjected to more restrictive and isolated conditions of confinement. This just reinforces the adage that young women are too few to matter, too few to be concerned

with. We will see the opening of the girls section here in Townsville later this year. 30 new cells for marginalised girls and young women, majority will be Aboriginal girls and young women and a high majority will be on child protection orders.

Which brings me to the other emerging issue is young girls being held in Residential Care Programs 24 hours, 7 days a week. They girls are under child protection orders by the State and are simply left languishing. My experiences working and representing these girls have been overwhelmingly similar. All they want to do is go home to their mothers and fathers, but are not permitted. Child Safety stops them, so the girls will run away from residential care workers and police are called. Girls are being criminalised as a ridiculous rate in such episodes and after complaints made by residential care. I know first hand of young girls being charged with numerous offences and entering the cycle of youth prison, back to resi care then back to youth prison, girls being raped, girls being burnt and of course young Patty Williams killed in a motor vehicle accident.

TELL PATTY'S Story – 4 years in care, not allowed to see her mum on the day of her death – distressed and ran away. The State delivers Patty back to her mum dead in a box. There job is done.

Minister Tracy Davis – Department of Communities has been reported in the media that they will be having an inquiry into the Child Protection System in Qld. Sisters Inside will provide the inquiry raising these concerning issues of the use of residential care.

## **The Present**

Among all criminalised women, we are seeing the so called "war on drugs" really becoming a war on the most dispossessed, as we see increased numbers of women resorting to using, selling, or otherwise dealing in legal or illegal drugs in order to cope with everyday life and/or to allow them to gain extra financial resources in order to cope and survive. We are also seeing the increased feminization and criminalization of poverty.

We are also seeing the increased likelihood that progressive trends developed by women to address misogynist violence by men, have increasingly been used against them. At the same time as we are seeing decreases in the number of women who are willing to seek protection from the system, we are also seeing a backlash in the form of so-called gender neutral, zero tolerance policies. As a result, battered women, most of whom have called the police themselves after being battered, are increasingly being counter-charged. This is especially true in

circumstances where women have defended themselves against the abuse. In too many such situations, both are charged with assault and in the worse situations, both the abusive man and the abused woman end up in the same anger management programs.

**EXPLAIN - Dual Domestic Violence Orders – woman charged not man – lengthy time in prison – told to plea guilty – can't communicate with white male lawyers etc**

We are also seeing increased numbers of women who have used lethal force in situations of abuse and violence pleading guilty to manslaughter. In most such cases, the women were charged with murder despite the fact that they were responding defensively. Most women are counselled to plead guilty to manslaughter, so women experience that backlash as well. We have no figures in Australia, but when Judge Ratushny conducted the Self Defence Review in Canada, she found that approximately 20-30 of the women serving federal sentences in relation to the deaths of abusive partners had entered guilty pleas, and therefore she could not review their cases. We know this occurs here but don't have the actual research at this point in time and would find it a valuable piece of research if any academic is interested in undertaking similar research.

These are all grim realities, but despite them those of us who work with and are allied with women prisoners, know very well that those women continue to call upon all of us to do our utmost to ensure their voices are heard. That they are brought out from behind the walls. The result of their continued perseverance is that we are afforded the privilege of continuing to walk with them as they challenge the manner in which they are held captive and imprisoned in Queensland.

Over the next several years, we anticipate further regressive policy and law reform and initiatives to be undertaken by the LNP under the guise of meting out decisions that will be acceptable to public opinion. These will be based on their own perceptions and will be highly subjective. Sisters Inside and many other organizations, on the other hand, may have to resort again to sustained and public action, similar to the complaint we filed in 2004 regarding the systemic discrimination and violation of women prisoners' human rights in Queensland.

### Human Rights Complaint

The result of this intensive effort was that, on International Women's Day, March 8, 2006, ADCQ tabled their report on women in prison and confirmed that there had been many breaches of discrimination and human rights in Queensland prisons. The majority of these

recommendations have not been implemented to date. I believe that human rights and discrimination breaches are going to be worse under this new government.

Sisters Inside's human rights complaint was supported by a number of Aboriginal organisations, women's organisations, and 100s of women who experienced the human rights breaches by prison authorities. Of course, we were punished for supporting the already punished. We were banned from providing services to women in Qld Prisons and then I was personally banned from all Queensland prisons. But we didn't and don't resile from the content of that report, or from the empowerment such a process offers to those whose plights have been long ignored.

We are now hearing more complaints than ever before in the short time since the election of LNP. It seems Sisters Inside will have to take women's complaints to the UN. Although this government will no doubt refuse to respond to the UN, we still need to undertake this process so women's voices and the abuse inflicted on them are made public.

The women have to know that we are fighting for them out here in the free world. While they are imprisoned their voices have to be heard and we facilitate that for them all.

**HERE TALK ABOUT: TOWNSVILLE PROVIDES VIVID EXAMPLES FOR SUCH A COMPLAINT TO THE UN. TALK ABOUT WHAT THE FUNDING DID AND GIVE AN EXAMPLE OF THE LIFE OF A WOMAN IN TOWNSVILLE CC**

In essence, Sisters Inside believes that prisons don't work. How can anyone say they do? They have comprehensively failed at their own stated aims: mainly 'to rehabilitate' or to provide visible deterrents. How can any woman emerge from prison more wise, more whole, more happy, when she has lost so much? The losses, as I've said, start long before a woman enters the gates, is told to strip off her clothes and be inspected, sexually assaulted by the State, hands over every possession and anything that may relate to her individual identity. She has normally already lost her children, her relationships, her family role, her home, her job, her dignity. Her time inside will remove the shreds of her self-esteem and any sense of who she is and where she belongs.

She will be given minimal or no training or work opportunities. No chance to reinvent herself, except, perhaps, in negative ways. How is she meant to face the brave new world outside when she is released, with a garbage bag of clothes and no way to get to the nearest Centrelink office, where she will go through further indignities to collect \$260 with which to find accommodation, get a bed and a fridge, buy food

to fill it and get her children back? Not to mention some clothes for the interviews for the jobs she just knows she's not going to get.

No wonder people fall back on old contacts and old ways. No wonder the recidivism rate is over 60 percent. And that's called success in prison terms. When 60 percent of people come back. In any other big organisation the CEO and the board would be sacked.

But let's look to the future. Try not to think that in Queensland there is any chance that we face the prospect of a government comprised of vicious little misogynist white supremacists. Try not to think we are in this time of right wing sentiments and neo-conservative social, economic and political war on the poor, women, children, the racialized and especially those who are criminalized.

Try to remember we also have courageous women like yourselves, like those who walk with me at Sisters Inside, who are challenging the status quo. The courageous women in our prisons are surviving brutality day in day out.

Now is NOT the time to compromise our values, our principles or beliefs. If we do, we will be the easiest to steam roll --- 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 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.

Encouraging and facilitating the access of advocacy groups like ours and others doing feminist, anti-racist, anti-poverty and human rights work, to provide women and girls with accurate and accessible information and tools to advocate individually and collectively, is yet another strategy. Not the prohibition of books and human rights how-to guides so that women can make complaints for themselves and others in prison. Not the stripping of funding for programs for the poorest, the most disadvantaged, those with the least resources. The result of stripping funds will be prison expansion.

Penal expansion has far reaching consequences beyond prison walls which are extremely damaging to all of us.

Much is possible, right now, if we merely have the will to stand together, to collaborate and confront the myths, misconceptions as well as the realities that are our current challenges.

Crime is a theory.

Name any behaviour and we will be able to identify times when it is considered legal and times when it is not. Law and criminalization are theories and choices made by those who we give the authority, as well as those who take power.

Who among us does not already acknowledge that prisons are not the shelters battered women need, that they are not treatment centres or places of healing, that they are not an appropriate substitution for adequate and affordable housing, education or skills development.

We know who is and who is not in prison.

With few exceptions, the wealthy and most privileged are not jailed. Crime is a theory -- defined, monitored and enforced for specific identifiable purposes.

Rather than personalizing the various legal, human rights and social justice struggles and uprisings of prisoners, we are hopeful that increasingly, all will recognize that it is always in our collective interest when the oppressed resist and challenge their oppression. Increasing prisoner access to the justice and equality occasioned by social inclusion will benefit all of us and all of our communities of interest.

We encourage you to join the growing world-wide political, economic, and social coalition to stop the increased intrusion of the state in terms

of surveillance and social control as well as the retreat of the state in terms of the provision of supportive social, health and educational services

Now is the time to resist. To resist the fear-mongering and the small-mindedness and the astonishing lack of compassion we are once more seeing around us. Now is the time to stand together. Indeed, as a lifer named Gayle often reminds me, "There is strength in sisterhood."

And then there are these words, these most powerful words, from an Aboriginal woman named Lilla Watson who best encapsulates and conveys the message of our work:

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,  
then let us work together.

This talk is dedicated to young Patty Williams who died while running away from a residential care lock up to get to her mother. To Tracey Inglis who died in TW prison October 2010 – the pain was unbearable and she sliced her arms and bled to death. And to Tash who died

January 2<sup>nd</sup> this year, unable to take the pain of life any longer and sadly leaving behind Londane and Easten 3 and 4 year olds.

And to the many, many more amazingly courageous and inspirational women I walk with daily...

Thank you to all of you for the part you do now and will do, to change the world, and try to prevent harm befalling others. It is always a tremendous privilege and weighty responsibility to be among such dedicated and accomplished women and men as those of you gathered here, and even more so in light of the pressure to ably and adequately represent the views and interests of the women with and on behalf of whom I have the tremendous pleasure and daunting responsibility to work and walk with. I join you today in the spirit of extending equality to all women.

I especially want to thank the women in and from prison, some of whom are with us here today, as well as their families, friends and other supporters, and all of the front-line workers who advocate - you know who you are.

I also want to acknowledge the important work done by Sisters Inside in North Queensland and many other women's organisations and the Aboriginal and social justice equality-seeking groups.

And, to women and girls with the lived experience who are my constant allies, agitators, mentors and friends, your strength, courage and perseverance continue to inspire and drive me.

Thank you.