

8 August 2008

Jindalee Conference Room

LEADERSHIP

Acknowledge the traditional land owners

Acknowledge Ken for invitation

GOOD EVENING AND THANK YOU ALL FOR COMING. ALTHOUGH IT HAS BEEN MORE THAN 16 YEARS SINCE I LIVED IN A PRISON CELL AND HAD A PRISON NUMBER, I'M STILL SOMETIMES SURPRISED TO FIND MYSELF STANDING IN FRONT OF A GROUP OF PEOPLE LIKE THIS ONE, AT YOUR INVITATION. TWELVE YEARS AGO, I WOULD HAVE THOUGHT YOU AND I WERE SO DIFFERENT THAT I WOULD HAVE NOTHING TO SAY TO YOU, NOR YOU TO ME. BUT I FEEL DIFFERENTLY NOW AND I HOPE YOU WILL TOO AT THE END OF THIS FUNCTION.

YOU'VE ASKED ME HERE TODAY TO TALK ABOUT LEADERSHIP. FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF DEBBIE KILROY, DIRECTOR OF SISTERS INSIDE, OAM, AND ALL THE OTHER THINGS IT SAYS ABOUT ME ON YOUR INVITATION – SOCIAL WORKER, PSYCHOTHERAPIST, LAWYER. BUT WHATEVER I HAVE TO SAY ALSO COMES FROM DEBBIE KILROY, FORMER PRISONER. THE PERSON WHO HAD HER FIRST TASTE OF IMPRISONMENT AT 13, HER FIRST

TASTE OF THE BRUTALITY AND CONTRADICTION OF LOCKING PEOPLE UP. WHO SPENT MOST OF HER FORMATIVE YEARS RICOCHETING IN AND OUT OF DETENTION CENTRES, GRADUATING TO THE ADULT PRISON AT 17 AND THEN IN HER TWENTIES. I AM THE SAME PERSON. THE ONE WHO WENT TO PRISON, LOST HER CHILDREN, HER FAMILY, HER HOME AND LIVELIHOOD, WHO WITNESSED HER CLOSE FRIEND MURDERED IN THE CHAIR NEXT TO HER, IS INSEPARABLE FROM THE PERSON DESCRIBED ON YOUR INVITATION. THIS BLURRING OF IDENTITY IS SOMETHING I HAD TO COME TO TERMS WITH WHEN I LEFT PRISON – DO YOU HAVE TO CHANGE YOURSELF, IN YOUR BEING, TO FIT IN WITH SOCIETY OUTSIDE PRISON? IS IT THE CASE OF A ‘BAD’ PERSON TURNING INTO A ‘GOOD’ ONE?

WITH THE SUPPORT OF VERY GOOD FRIENDS, I REALISED THAT WASN’T THE CASE. I DIDN’T HAVE TO CHANGE MUCH AT ALL. I JUST HAD TO STOP DOING CRIME. I’M TELLING YOU THIS FOR TWO REASONS: ONE IS TO CRACK THE TERRIBLE STEREOTYPES OF THE KINDS OF WOMEN WHO FIND THEMSELVES IN PRISON. THEY ARE NO MORE ‘BAD’ THAN YOU OR I. THE SECOND REASON IS PART OF WHAT I WANT TO TELL YOU ABOUT LEADERSHIP, AND THE WAY I APPROACH IT, WHICH COMES OUT OF MY WHOLE EXPERIENCE, OUT OF MY WHOLE EXISTENCE, THE YEARS INSIDE AS WELL AS OUTSIDE PRISON.

THIS MIGHT HELP YOU TO UNDERSTAND THAT THE BASIS OF MY APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP IS NOT ABOUT ME. IT'S ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE. IT'S EASY TO ASSUME LEADING IS ABOUT ONESELF, ABOUT ONE PERSON AHEAD OF THE PACK. I BELIEVE EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IS THE OPPOSITE OF THAT. IT IS ABOUT STEPPING OUTSIDE YOURSELF.

LEADERSHIP DOESN'T EXIST FOR ITS OWN PURPOSES. IT EXISTS PRIMARILY FOR THE PURPOSES OF OTHERS. AS SOON AS YOU FALL INTO THE TRAP OF SELF INTEREST, YOU BECOME HOOKED INTO THE WEB OF POWER AND CONTROL. AND YOU STOP BEING A LEADER.

POWER AND CONTROL ARE THINGS I KNOW WELL. IN PRISON, THE SYSTEM IS SO HUGE, AND YOU ARE SO SUBJUGATED, HAMMERED DOWN, THAT YOU FEEL YOU HAVE NO POWER AT ALL. AND IT'S NOT JUST A FEELING: YOU REALLY DON'T HAVE ANY POWER, YOU ARE POWERLESS.

PRISON IS FUNDAMENTALLY ABOUT POWER AND THE LACK OF IT. IT'S ABOUT THOSE WHO HAVE IT CONTROLLING THOSE WHO DON'T. YOU HAVE TO REMEMBER THAT THE MAJORITY OF WOMEN IN PRISON HAVE BEEN POWERLESS ALL THEIR LIVES: GROWING UP IN POVERTY AND DISADVANTAGE, WITH THE KIND OF VIOLENCE AND ABUSE YOU MIGHT READ ABOUT IN THE PAPERS, THEY MISS OUT ON ALL THE THINGS THAT

GIVE OTHER PEOPLE THEIR POWER: EDUCATION, SOCIALISATION, A LOVING FAMILY.

OF COURSE PRISONS AREN'T THE ONLY INSTITUTIONS THAT ARE ABOUT POWER. GOVERNMENTS ARE TOO. BIG COMPANIES ARE TOO. AND SO ARE BUREAUCRACIES, THE KINDS OF ENVIRONMENTS YOU ALL WORK IN. YOU WOULD KNOW ALL ABOUT THAT ALREADY. WHETHER YOU HAVE BOUGHT INTO IT OR NOT, YOU MUST KNOW THAT FOR THOSE WHO DO, EVERYTHING BECOMES SO INDIVIDUALISTIC THAT EVERYONE ELSE IS FORGOTTEN. YOU FORGET THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU, AND IT BECOMES A LOSE, LOSE SITUATION. NO ONE REALLY WINS WITH SELFISH OR AMBITIOUS LEADERSHIP.

I BELIEVE YOU MUST HAVE CORE VALUES THAT ARE ABOUT OTHERS. NOT ABOUT AMBITION. AND YOU HAVE TO HAVE A VISION THAT YOU ARE FAITHFUL TO, FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS YOU ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT.

WHEN I THINK ABOUT LEADERS WHO HAVE INSPIRED ME, I THINK OF GHANDI, I THINK OF NELSON MANDELA, WHO MANAGED TO KEEP HIS VALUES AND VISION INTACT THROUGHOUT A LONG AND CRUEL PERIOD OF IMPRISONMENT, AND WAS ABLE TO SURVIVE BECAUSE THOSE VALUES WERE BIGGER THAN HE WAS, AND HIS VISION WAS WIDER THAN THE

FOUR WALLS THAT LOCKED HIM IN. HIS VISION WASN'T ABOUT AMBITION, IT WAS ABOUT CHANGE.

LEADERSHIP IS ABOUT VISION. IT ISN'T ABOUT INDIVIDUALISM. ITS PERILS ARE EGO, AND AGENDAS, BOTH OF WHICH CAN ONLY LEAD TO DEFEAT. LEADERSHIP IS TWO-WAY; TREATING PEOPLE WITH RESPECT AND HONESTY. IT'S ABOUT WALKING *WITH* OTHERS, NOT AHEAD OF THEM. EVEN IF SOME OF THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU AREN'T ENTIRELY ON YOUR SIDE, AND MAY NOT WANT TO GO THE WHOLE 100 MILES WITH YOU, THEY WILL GO A FAIR WAY IF THEY'RE TREATED WITH RESPECT AND DIGNITY. AS FELLOW TRAVELLERS, NOT HINDRANCES.

I'D LIKE TO TELL YOU A BIT ABOUT SISTERS INSIDE, AND WHY I THINK IT WORKS. SISTERS INSIDE WAS BORN FROM A UNIQUE COMBINATION OF CIRCUMSTANCES AND PERSONALITIES OVER 16 YEARS AGO. IT GREW DIRECTLY OUT OF MY OWN PRISON EXPERIENCE, WHICH IN TURN WAS AFFECTED PROFOUNDLY BY AN EXPERIMENT IN LEADERSHIP FROM THE NEWLY ELECTED GOSS GOVERNMENT IN 1989.

THAT GOVERNMENT INITIATED THE KIND OF REFORM IN QUEENSLAND PRISONS THAT HAS NEVER BEEN TRIED AGAIN. FACED WITH A DISINTEGRATING SYSTEM, AND THEN A MURDER INSIDE THE WOMEN'S PRISON, THAT GOVERNMENT MADE CHANGES THAT ENABLED WOMEN

PRISONERS TO TAKE CONTROL OF THEIR LIVES. LIMITED CONTROL, FOR SURE, BUT MANY WOMEN TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THE OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED: TO GET AN EDUCATION, TO GET WORK EXPERIENCE, TO SPEND MORE TIME OUTSIDE PRISON WITH THEIR FAMILIES, TO HAVE A SAY IN HOW THE PRISON OPERATED. TO LAY THE SEEDS THAT GREW INTO FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS OF LEADERSHIP

THIS WAS THE KIND OF CHANGE THAT DIRECTLY AFFECTED OUTCOMES FOR WOMEN. THEY GRABBED THE OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE SOME SAY OVER THEIR OWN LIVES, IN A WAY MOST HAD NEVER EXPERIENCED BEFORE, INSIDE OR OUTSIDE PRISON. MANY, LIKE ME, GOT AN EDUCATION, SAW HOW LIFE COULD BE DIFFERENT, GOT OUT AND DIDN'T EVER GO BACK TO PRISON. WELL NOT THE WAY THEY EXPECTED ANYWAY.

THE EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE WHO INITIATED THESE CHANGES WERE NOT MOTIVATED BY EGO OR INDIVIDUALISM. MOST TOOK HUGE RISKS TO ENSURE THE CHANGES HAPPENED. AND IT WORKED BECAUSE THEIR LEADERSHIP WAS BASED ON THE PROGRESS OF OTHERS, NOT THEMSELVES. IN FACT, SOME WOULD SAY THAT IT WAS A GAMBLE THAT MIGHT HAVE WORKED TO THEIR DETRIMENT. BUT WE ALL KNOW REAL LEADERSHIP IS NOT ABOUT SAFETY.

STILL, EVEN AFTER THE REFORMS, CONDITIONS INSIDE NEEDED MUCH IMPROVEMENT, AND I HAD ALWAYS TOLD THE WOMEN I LEFT BEHIND THAT I WOULD BE BACK, TO HELP BRING ABOUT THOSE IMPROVEMENTS. BUT THAT BRAVE EXPERIMENT IN REFORM HAD PROVED THAT CHANGE CANNOT BE IMPOSED ON PEOPLE. I KNEW ANY ORGANISATION WE FORMED TO CONTINUE THAT CHANGE WOULD HAVE TO BE IN THE HANDS OF THE WOMEN THEMSELVES.

SO SISTERS INSIDE WAS CONCEIVED AS AN ORGANISATION RUN FOR WOMEN IN PRISON, BY WOMEN IN PRISON. IT HAS TWO ROLES: TO PROVIDE VITAL SERVICES TO WOMEN IN PRISON, LIKE SEXUAL ASSAULT COUNSELLING, HEALTH AND DRUG COUNSELLING, AND HELP WITH KEEPING FAMILIES INTACT AND IN TOUCH. THESE SERVICES ARE CARRIED OUT BY PAID AND UNPAID STAFF. ITS OTHER ROLE IS ADVOCACY, WHICH IS CARRIED OUT BY THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE, WHICH IN TURN IS DIRECTED BY A STEERING COMMITTEE OF WOMEN INSIDE PRISON.

THE STEERING COMMITTEE IS THE BEATING HEART OF SISTERS INSIDE. IT INFORMS EVERYTHING WE DO AND HOW WE DO IT. AS SUCH SISTERS INSIDE IS UNIQUE THROUGHOUT THE WORLD, AND HELD UP AS A BEST PRACTICE MODEL BY PEOPLE LIKE ANGELA DAVIS, HERSELF AN ICONIC LEADER FOR DECADES IN THE FIGHT FOR JUSTICE IN THE UNITED STATES. THIS IS THE REAL POWER OF SISTERS INSIDE: THAT IT IS TRULY IN THE

HANDS OF THOSE IT SERVES. THIS IS THE WAY IT STAYS TRUE TO ITS VISION. IT IS AUTHENTIC: IT REFLECTS THE REAL EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN, AND IS TRUE TO THEM. I BELIEVE THIS IS ITS ABIDING STRENGTH. IT IS ITS LEADERSHIP MODEL

WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT THAT SISTERS INSIDE EXISTS? LET ME TELL YOU A LITTLE ABOUT WOMEN INSIDE PRISON. I'VE ALREADY MENTIONED DISADVANTAGE AND ABUSE. THE SHOCKING FIGURES ARE ACTUALLY THESE: THAT 98 PERCENT OF WOMEN IN PRISON HAVE EXPERIENCED PHYSICAL VIOLENCE OR ABUSE, AND 89 PERCENT HAVE EXPERIENCED SEXUAL ASSAULT OR SEXUAL ABUSE. MOST HAVE GROWN UP IN FAMILIES IN WHICH THEY ARE NOT VALUED, AND HAVE ENTERED ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS WHICH CONTINUE THROUGHOUT THEIR LIVES.

THE EFFECTS OF ALL THIS MEAN MOST HAVE A LOW LEVEL OF EDUCATION AND FEW SKILLS. THE ATTEMPTS THAT MANY MAKE TO SELF-MEDICATE, TO DEAL WITH THE PAIN OF LIFE, MEAN A GREAT PROPORTION HAVE ADDICTIONS TO DRUGS OR ALCOHOL. THEIR HEALTH IS CHARACTERISTICALLY POOR – EVEN CORRECTIVE SERVICES CONCED THAT – AND MANY HAVE MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES WHICH HAVE OFTEN NOT BEEN ADDRESSED. MORE ARE HOMELESS THEN EVER BEFORE.

A TOO-HIGH PROPORTION OF COURSE ARE INDIGENOUS. FOR THESE WOMEN, TAKE ALL THE ABOVE AND DOUBLE IT. SOME ARE FROM CULTURALLY DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS, AND FOR THEM, TAKE ALL THE ABOVE AND DOUBLE IT AS WELL.

SISTERS INSIDE ADVOCATES FOR THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF THESE WOMEN. WHEN I SAY THAT IT SOMETIMES SOUNDS LIKE A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS: THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN PRISON. THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF THESE WOMEN HAVE BEEN COMPROMISED WELL BEFORE THEY EVEN HIT THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM – THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT IT MEANS. FOR THEM, HUMAN RIGHTS ARE THINGS OTHER PEOPLE HAVE. LIFE – AND THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING A PRISONER – DOES THAT TO YOU. PRISON IS JUST ANOTHER EXPERIENCE ON THE CONTINUUM OF STRUGGLE AND DESPAIR THAT TYPIFIES MANY OF THEIR LIVES.

IN MY TIME INSIDE PRISON I SAW DAILY AND UNFORGETTABLY HOW THE WORDS 'HUMAN RIGHTS' CAN SEEM LUDICROUS TO SOMEONE WHO BARELY FEELS HUMAN ANY MORE. IF LIFE ON THE OUTSIDE MADE YOU FEEL WORTHLESS, PRISON CONVINCED YOU IT WAS TRUE. IN PRISON, YOU ARE SOMEONE SO BAD, SO SUSPECT, THAT YOUR EVERY MOVE IS DICTATED, SCRUTINISED, CRITICISED; SO BAD THAT ANYTHING YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN GOOD AT – BEING A WIFE, A MOTHER, A DAUGHTER,

AN EMPLOYEE – IS TAKEN FROM YOU; SO BAD YOU NEED TO BECOME SOMEONE ELSE.

I BELIEVED THAT ABOUT MYSELF FOR A WHILE TOO. I BELIEVED DEEPLY IN MY OWN BADNESS. I WAS TOLD AT 13, AFTER BEING LOCKED UP FOR WAGGING SCHOOL AND ARGUING WITH MY MOTHER, THAT I HAD KILLED MY FATHER. THAT I WAS SO BAD THAT THE HEART ATTACK THAT HE SUFFERED AT 37 WAS MY FAULT. I CARRIED THAT WITH ME FOR THE NEXT 20 YEARS, ACTING OUT THAT BADNESS AS HARD AS I COULD. JUST AS MANY OTHER WOMEN DO, CONVINCED THEY ARE NOT AS GOOD OR AS VALUABLE AS OTHER PEOPLE. CONVINCED THAT, BEING BAD, YOU DON'T DESERVE THE SAME RIGHTS AS OTHER PEOPLE.

IT TOOK MANY YEARS AND LOTS OF PAIN TO CONVINCING MYSELF OTHERWISE...

PART OF THE REASON I WAS ABLE TO LET GO WAS BEING PART OF THAT REFORM IN QUEENSLAND PRISONS IN THE LATE 80S AND EARLY 90S. THE KEY TO THAT REFORM WAS THAT WOMEN WERE ACTUALLY TREATED AS HUMAN BEINGS, WITH ALL THE RIGHTS AND DIGNITIES AFFORDED ALL OTHER HUMAN BEINGS. WE WERE GIVEN SOME CONTROL OVER OUR OWN LIVES.

BUT SINCE THAT MIRACULOUS TIME, WE HAVE LOST ALL THE GAINS WE MADE. SINCE THEN WE HAVE HAD THE PHONEY WAR ON DRUGS AND THE PHONEY FEAR CAMPAIGN ABOUT PERSONAL SAFETY WHICH FORCES PEOPLE TO MAKE THEIR HOMES INTO FORTRESSES, TO NOT TRUST ANYONE, AND TO RETREAT TO INDIVIDUALISM. LOOK AT THE RISE OF THE SO-CALLED 'GATED COMMUNITIES' WHICH ARE INTENT ON KEEPING OUT THOSE WHO DON'T BELONG THERE, KEEPING OUT 'THE OTHER', MEANING PEOPLE LIKE ME. BECAUSE DESPITE WHAT YOU MIGHT WANT TO SEE, DESPITE LABELS LIKE 'DIRECTOR' AND 'ORDER OF AUSTRALIA', I AM WHAT MANY OF THOSE PEOPLE FEAR – I AM ONE OF THE 'OTHERS'. I HAVE BEEN TO PRISON.

AND IT IS WOMEN LIKE ME WHO MAKE UP THE PREPOSTEROUS NUMBERS OF WOMEN IN PRISON. OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM AND CAMPAIGN OF FEAR HAS SEEN THE NUMBERS OF WOMEN IN PRISON SKYROCKET OVER THE PAST 15 YEARS. YOU COULD BE EXCUSED FOR NOT KNOWING THAT, BECAUSE THE BUMPER NUMBERS OF PRISONS BUILT TO HOUSE THESE PRISONERS ARE BUILT OF COURSE ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF TOWNS, WHERE THEY ARE CONVENIENTLY INVISIBLE.

WHERE THE THINGS THAT HAPPEN TO PRISONERS CANNOT BE SCRUTINISED. THIS IS ANOTHER REASON THE WORK OF SISTERS INSIDE IS SO CRUCIAL: OUR PRESENCE INSIDE THE WOMEN'S PRISON ALMOST

EVERY DAY, OUR SUPPORT OF WOMEN EXITING PRISON AND SUPPORT FOR THEIR CHILDREN, MEANS WE SEE, WE OBSERVE, AND WE CAN ACT. OR USED TO BE ABLE TO. BECAUSE IN 2004, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE HISTORY OF SISTERS INSIDE, WE WERE LOCKED OUT OF THE PRISON BY THIS STATE GOVERNMENT FOR AN OPEN-ENDED PERIOD OF TIME.

LET ME GIVE YOU SOME HISTORY: IN JUNE 2004, SISTERS INSIDE LAUNCHED A COMPLAINT AGAINST THE STATE GOVERNMENT ABOUT THE ABUSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS INSIDE WOMEN'S PRISONS. WE CONTEND WOMEN EXPERIENCE SYSTEMIC DISCRIMINATION ON THE BASIS OF SEX, AS WELL AS ON THE BASIS OF RACE AND DISABILITY INSIDE PRISON. WE ALSO CONTEND THAT MANDATORY STRIP SEARCHING, AND THE CRISIS SUPPORT UNIT, ARE USED IN A DISCRIMINATORY WAY AGAINST WOMEN.

I'LL GIVE YOU A COUPLE OF EXAMPLES:

LET'S START WITH THE WAY WOMEN ARE CLASSIFIED BY THE QUEENSLAND PRISON SYSTEM.

THERE IS A MEASUREMENT OF RISK USED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIVE SERVICES, THE OFFENDER RISK NEEDS INVENTORY, OTHERWISE KNOWN AT THE ORNI - WHICH CONVERTS DISADVANTAGE OR NEED INTO RISK. WOMEN ARE PENALISED FOR THEIR SOCIAL DISADVANTAGE (AND AS IF THEY HAVEN'T BEEN ALREADY)

ATTRACTING A HIGHER SECURITY CLASSIFICATION IF THEY HAVE A HIGH LEVEL OF SOCIAL DISADVANTAGE. SO THAT A WOMAN LIVING IN WOODRIDGE, WHO HAS EXPERIENCED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, OR A WOMAN WITH A MENTAL DISABILITY, GETS A HIGHER CLASSIFICATION. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN – SHE IS KEPT IN A MAXIMUM SECURITY PRISON AND WILL NOT HAVE ACCESS TO GRADUAL RELEASE BY BEING TRANSFERRED TO A LOW SECURITY PRISON. YES RELEASED STRAIGHT FROM MAXIMUM SECURITY PRISON – PUT OUTSIDE THE GATE WITH A GARBAGE BAG OF BELONGINGS – NO MONEY OR ACCOMMODATION AND LEFT ISOLATED - WITH NO CHANCE TO REINTEGRATE BACK INTO THE COMMUNITY

AND STRIP SEARCHING? IT IS MANDATORY IN QUEENSLAND AFTER ANY CONTACT VISIT. IT SOUNDS STRAIGHTFORWARD BUT LET'S UNPACK IT A BIT. LET'S TAKE ONE OF THE WOMEN WHO HAS BEEN PREVIOUSLY SEXUALLY ASSAULTED OR ABUSED, AND WHO HAS A COUPLE OF SMALL CHILDREN ON THE OUTSIDE. DON'T FORGET, 89 % HAVE BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED, AND 85 % ARE NOT JUST MOTHERS BUT ARE THE PRIMARY CARE GIVERS OF THEIR CHILDREN).

IF THAT WOMAN'S CHILDREN COME TO VISIT HER, AND SHE WANTS TO TOUCH THEM, TO CUDDLE THEM OR STROKE THEIR HAIR, TOUCH THEIR FACES, SHE KNOWS THAT THE PAYBACK IS TAKING OFF HER CLOTHES IN

FRONT OF A BUNCH OF PRISON OFFICERS. HOLDING UP HER BREASTS FOR INSPECTION. SQUATTING AND COUGHING, IN CASE SHE HAS SECRETED SOMETHING IN HER GENITALS.

THINK ABOUT THAT FOR A MOMENT: THINK ABOUT THAT HAPPENING TO YOU, OR YOUR SISTER, OR YOUR MOTHER, OR YOUR DAUGHTER, OR YOUR BEST FRIEND, THE HUMILIATION, THE EXPOSURE, THE VULNERABILITY OF ANY WOMAN ALREADY STRIPPED OF HER DIGNITY, AND NOW STRIPPED OF HER CLOTHES. ADD TO THAT THE TRAUMA SHE MIGHT FEEL AS EACH STRIP SEARCH RE-ACTIVATES THE HORROR OF SEXUAL ABUSE, OF THAT TERRIBLE POWERLESSNESS SHE FELT THEN, THE VULNERABILITY. IN QUEENSLAND WE DO THAT MORE THAN 15,000 TIMES A YEAR TO THE WOMEN IN OUR PRISONS.

AND FOR WHAT: GO ON HERE ABOUT THE RESULTS OF STRIP SEARCHES, THE FAILURE OF FOI THIS TIME, THE ABUSES OF IT – THE BABY BEING SEARCHED, THE YOUNG WOMEN IN DETENTION. 41,728 SEARCHES BETWEEN 1999 – 2002. 13, 288 LAST YEAR AT BRISBANE WOMEN’S PRISON – CONTRABAND FOUND

THESE ARE SOME OF THE REASONS WE LAUNCHED A HUMAN RIGHTS COMPLAINT, AND WHY THAT COMPLAINT HAS BEEN PICKED UP IN MOST AUSTRALIAN STATES AND OVERSEAS. THAT COMPLAINT WAS

INVESTIGATED BY THE QUEENSLAND ANTI-DISCRIMINATION COMMISSIONER AND THE WOMEN IN PRISON REPORT WAS TABLED IN PARLIAMENT ON THE 8TH MARCH 2006; MORE RECENTLY NORTHERN TERRITORY JUST TABLED THEIR REPORT INTO THE HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATIONS EXPERIENCED BY WOMEN IN NT PRISONS.

EXTRAORDINARILY, HOWEVER, JUST DAYS AFTER THE COMPLAINT WAS RECEIVED IN JUNE, THE STATE GOVERNMENT TOOK ITS REVENGE AND NOTIFIED SISTERS INSIDE THAT WE WOULD NO LONGER BE PERMITTED TO PROVIDE OUR SERVICES TO WOMEN INSIDE PRISON. THOSE QUEUES OF WOMEN RELYING ON REGULAR SEXUAL ASSAULT COUNSELLING FOR INSTANCE, WOULD JUST HAVE TO WAIT. WE WERE ALSO INFORMED THAT OUR MONTHLY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETINGS INSIDE BRISBANE WOMEN'S PRISON WOULD ALSO BE BANNED.

WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN NO LOGICAL REASON FOR THIS LOCK-OUT. IN ITS ABSENCE WE HAVE HAD TO DRAW OUR OWN CONCLUSIONS: THAT IN THIS STATE – INDEED IN THIS COUNTRY – RAISING YOUR VOICE TO PROTECT THE POWERLESS, TO POINT OUT AND TO TRY TO CORRECT INJUSTICE, BRINGS THE WRATH OF THE POWERFUL DOWN UPON YOUR HEAD. CRITICISM ATTRACTS PUNISHMENT. THOSE IN LEADERSHIP IN THIS STATE ARE THREATENED BY ANY PERSON OR GROUP WHO DARES TO STRAY FROM THE LINE – THAT THIS IS THE SMART STATE WHERE THE

GOVERNMENT KNOWS BEST. SO THREATENED THAT THEY WILL TRY TO SILENCE THAT CRITICISM BY DENYING THIS GROUP ITS FUNCTIONS.

WELL, WE HAVE NEWS FOR THE GOVERNMENT AND FOR CORRECTIVE SERVICES. SISTERS INSIDE IS NOT GOING ANYWHERE. WE WILL SURVIVE PRECISELY BECAUSE OF THE REASONS I BEGAN THIS SPEECH WITH: BECAUSE WE ARE NOT ABOUT ONE PERSON. OUR MOTTO IS WALKIN' THE TALK AND THAT'S WHAT WE DO: WE WALK WITH THE WOMEN. OUR APPROACH IS NOT POWER OVER ANYONE, IT IS POWER **WITH** THE WOMEN. AND THAT IS WHY WE WILL BE HERE LONG AFTER THIS GOVERNMENT, THIS BUREAUCRACY, FADES AWAY, WHICH IT CAN DO EVERY THREE YEARS AT ELECTION TIME.

IN THE MEANTIME WE WILL LEAD THE FIGHT TO MAKE THE INJUSTICES PERPETRATED AGAINST WOMEN IN PRISON VISIBLE TO THE COMMUNITY, AND IN FACT FIGHT FOR THE ABOLITION OF WOMEN'S PRISONS.

THE REALITY IS THAT – EVEN THOUGH INDIGENOUS AND DISADVANTAGED WOMEN DOMINATE THE NUMBERS, ANYONE CAN GO TO PRISON. REMEMBERING WE HAD THE SPECTACLE OF OUR CHIEF MAGISTRATE SERVING TIME IN MAXIMUM SECURITY, FOLLOWED CLOSELY BY A HIGH PROFILE POLITICIAN. ANYONE WHO WATCHED THOSE WOMEN EMERGE FROM BEHIND THOSE GATES AFTER THEY WERE

FINALLY RELEASED, ANYONE WHO WITNESSED THE TRAUMA ETCHED ON THEIR FACES MUST HAVE ACKNOWLEDGED HOW RIDICULOUS THE GOVERNMENT'S MANTRA OF 'COMMUNITY SAFETY' AND 'REHABILITATION' IS. DID YOU ALL FEEL SAFER BECAUSE THESE TWO WOMEN WENT TO PRISON? DID PAULINE HANSON, TREMBLING, TRAUMATISED, HURT, LOOK REHABILITATED TO YOU?

TAKE THAT FURTHER: DO WE REALLY EXPECT A WOMAN WHOSE LIFE HAS BEEN SCARRED BY POVERTY AND ABUSE AND ADDICTION, WHO IS THEN LOCKED UP, SEPARATED FROM HER FAMILY, HER CHILDREN, ANY SUPPORT SHE MAY HAVE HAD, DENIED HER HUMAN RIGHTS, DENIED THE CHANCE TO GAIN ANY SKILLS OR TRAINING, HUMILIATED CONSTANTLY – DO WE REALLY EXPECT THAT WHEN SHE IS FINALLY LET OUT OF PRISON THAT SHE WILL BE A **BETTER** PERSON? NO MONEY, NO HOME, NO JOB, NO KIDS, NO SELF ESTEEM, BUT STILL A MORE EFFECTIVE MEMBER OF THE COMMUNITY? A BETTER MOTHER TO THE CHILDREN SHE HAS BEEN KEPT AWAY FROM?

TAKE IT FROM ME: PRISONS DON'T WORK. TO MY MIND, IT WOULD BE A SIGN OF A TRULY GREAT LEADER IF SOME PREMIER OR PRIME MINISTER IN THIS COUNTRY TOOK A CLOSE LOOK AT WHICH WOMEN ARE IN PRISON, WHY THEY ARE, HOW THEY ARE TREATED, WHY MORE THAN 60 PERCENT OF THEM WILL RETURN TO PRISON, AND THEN DECIDED THAT

WOMEN'S PRISONS WERE IN FACT A TERRIBLE HISTORICAL MISTAKE.
THAT THERE ARE BETTER WAYS. THAT THEY HAVE IN FACT BEEN WRONG.

NOW THAT WOULD BE LEADERSHIP.