

Grand Valley Institution for Women

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It is my hope that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau will follow through with his “promise” to Indigenous people across Canada, which includes seeing through an inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women. I have personally been a walking target on the streets and in every jail that I have been in. Therefore, I know first-hand how discrimination and violence affect people like me, as an Indigenous person, a woman, a mother, a citizen, a daughter, a prisoner, a sister, a friend. The list goes on. In 2006, I was made an example of as “a young woman”. I was 21, naïve, with an ego bigger than the men that I grew up with. I was facing a dangerous offender application while I was on remand for 4.5 years at Pinegrove in Saskatchewan. I was on segregation status for 18 months and what they call “red-card” status.

In Pinegrove Correctional Centre, all my experiences over many years almost left me for dead in a lonely, cold, isolated cell feeling suicidal and hopeless. These past three years have been a wake-up call to my spirit. My sister and father passed away three months prior to one another. They were my only support throughout my life. I believe that I died inside when I was denied the opportunity to attend, not only their funerals, but those of all of my relatives. Not once have I been granted an escort to attend any of my family’s burials. Yes, it killed me inside, but as a spiritual woman, the belief I have is that they are all around me. This has helped me spiritually, but has also left me painfully grieving to hear their voices, see their faces. Despite this, I am determined to make it in this life, to carry on their legacy.

Once in the federal penitentiary system, I experienced numerous changes as part of the Harper government’s “punishment agenda”. The negative changes I have been subject to occurred as much of Correctional Service Canada’s budget was diverted to expanding its capacity to confine prisoners and cut thereafter include:

1. Malnutrition for maximum-security prisoners because our food is all processed and we are given powdered milk with no calcium.
2. There is little to no health care and mental health nurses in a maximum-security setting.
3. There is limited access to programming because of a lack of facilitators.
4. The further pay deductions impacts our communication with society because with the little pay we get every two weeks we have

to make choices between things like purchasing hygiene items or using the money to call family or get stamps to correspond to help time go by. I usually put money on my phone card to call my son and the remainder goes towards my hygiene.

5. There are no life skills training for maximum-security prisoners, impacting my rehabilitation and reintegration into society as a Canadian citizen.
6. Elders rarely enter the maximum-security settings, which undermines our efforts to connect to our culture and spirituality.

Many aspects of the previous government's punishment agenda were unconstitutional, pushing prisoners to make a decision between life and death. I chose a life sentence in a lonely isolated cell. What I would like to see moving forward is that Mr. Trudeau follow through on his promise to Indigenous people to seek out and do something about the root cause of this problematic factor that is killing my people every-day in and outside of prisons. We are not supported or believed in by this discriminating judicial system and the Government of Canada more broadly. I believe that I will always remain a walking target, because I am a talking target behind these walls. I will not stop! I have written numerous letters without receiving any responses, no real action, not being respected.

POST-SCRIPT

With a lot of things going on, contributing to this collection was a priority to me because Harper's government had really made my life a living hell. Indigenous women continue to be overrepresented in federal penitentiaries today, a deplorable issue that seems to be dismissed or ignored. I am so tired and afraid that CSC is going to kill me and my death is going to be ruled off as a natural cause from a heart attack or a suicide. I am afraid to tell anyone how I feel in this place because they are not here to help me, they are here to do their job. Five days ago, I told the staff and my Parole Officer that I wanted to kill myself. I received an institutional charge for disrespecting him because he heard me say something else. The system is simply not setup to help people.