



ourcommunity.com.au



The Great Debate: In the Face of the Enormity of Global Threats, Local Action is a Waste of Time

Communities in Control Conference
Melbourne, 16 June, 2008

The Honourable Joan Kirner
Former Premier of Victoria

Meredith Carter
Kindergarten Parents Victoria

Debbie Kilroy OAM
Director, Sisters Inside

Jenny McGregor
Chief Executive, Asialink

Stella Young
Journalist, TV Presenter and Educator

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the
2008 Communities in Control Conference, convened by
Our Community & Centacare Catholic Family Services, June 2008
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic

Joan Kirner:

I'm very pleased to be chairing the debate. But before I start what I wanted to do was just say thank you to all the organisers of the Communities in Control conference, all the people working out the back – Rhonda, Joe, Denis, all the people. Because I just think as I watch and listen to this parade of people, sharing their knowledge with us, I don't know that I ever go to a conference which is more knowledge packed and more interactive. So could we put our hands together for the organisers.

Now, as you know, I'm a very fair chairperson. I don't let my views get in the way at all, and I stick to the rules. Each speaker speaks for 10 minutes and then the two leaders of the debate have the right of reply for five minutes.

I just want to say a few other things before I introduce our debaters today. The first thing is I've been sitting there for part of this conference feeling really as though we've got a great opportunity. I just feel the world has turned on its axis just a little bit, and that we can keep propelling it towards social inclusion if we unite the power in this conference, and it is considerable power, if we unite the power in this conference and keep tilting the axis towards social inclusion.

This is something I haven't felt for something like 20 years. How many other people feel that there's just a chance, that we just might be...? Yeah that's how I feel. I felt like that when I was very much younger, coming into the early 1970s. How many of you weren't alive then? I hope a lot of you weren't alive then otherwise we oldies are capturing the day.

But I just feel that that chance is there. And that what we need to do is go out from this conference and exercise our power to change, not just with good intentions. And that's why I was so glad of the moving of that motion following up Pat Turner's great address – the connection and understanding that power really can come from this number of people joining together.

And it's also serendipity, which is something I'm not really used to, that last night I was reading a book that I'd ordered from the New Internationalist. It's called *The Great Neighbourhood Book*. How many of you have read it? Not too many. Well I recommend it. It's not the first book I'm going to recommend today. It's a do-it-yourself guide to place making, neighbourhood building. It's by a Canadian guy called Jay Walljasper and it's available from New Society Publishers.

It starts off with a series of recommendations, as many books do. And one of them is from Jim Hightower, who's the author of a wonderful book called *Thieves in High Places*, a great name. And he says, and I think this sums up many of the people at this conference, that we're often told that regular people have no power anymore. But when they get together with their neighbours to work on important issues in their own backyard anything is possible.

Jay regales us with stories of folks all over the country who have rolled up their sleeves to make big changes in their neighbourhood and the world. So read on, get riled up, roll up your sleeves and take power. I hope that's the effect of this conference.

And it's the topic, is it not, of this debate. Whether you feel all downhearted and depressed about global issues and you can't do anything because global issues are pressing down on you and *they'll* decide – you know, those people over there, *they*.

They is a copout, isn't it really? *They'll decide* is really a cop out. Mind you, I'd probably be feeling a lot younger and healthier if I hadn't kept saying, "*They* is a cop out," and attacking them. But never mind.

But talking about what we can do is a step towards progress. Now, that doesn't mean to say that from time to time I don't just put my head in my hands and think, "What do you do?" Despite all our good intentions, what do you do?

And then I see someone like Pat Turner speak with such passion and I think, “Well how dare I put my head in my hands and think what do you do, that it’s all hopeless.”

Because if you’ve got the passion, you can have the power. And I can see in this room people I’ve known for some 30 years who have maintained the passion. If you maintain the passion for equity you can retain or regain the power.

Now, you probably won’t be surprised to think that I think that this debate is two sides of the coin. One side of the coin is global, the other side of the coin is local. For me, both sides of the coin are important.

So what a terrible chair – to actually come to a compromise before we’ve had the debate! But I figure I mightn’t get a word in later so Denis said I could do it now.

The second point that I want to make is that I am hopeful, because I also think that for the first time in ages federally the Government is listening – the Government is not necessarily doing all that we would like it to do, but I just feel it is listening.

Maybe it’s because I’m lucky enough to know that people like Jenny Macklin and Tanya Plibersek live in their own communities and work in their own communities. Maybe it’s that, that’s a special privilege that I have because I’ve known them for years.

But I always feel more comfortable when I know that people who represent me are actually experiencing some of the things that I’ve experienced as a community activist. So that’s one thing.

The second thing is I feel the language has changed a bit. I was in the intensive care unit at Epworth when the Prime Minister made the apology. I was lying there in ICU and there was no television and I knew that the next morning the apology was going to be on and I wouldn’t be there. But at least I had to see it.

Now you're not exactly the most powerful person when you're lying there in ICU. (Marvellous nursing I must say. Absolutely fabulous.) But there I was thinking, "How do I achieve this? How do I break the rules, get a television set into ICU and be allowed to watch it?"

So what did I do? What I usually do, what I'm sure all you would have done in past and current lives. I asked. I summed up the various people around me and I looked at the most promising doctor. And now that I'm about to be 70 it wasn't the one who was most promising in looks, it was the one who looked most promising in sympathy.

And so I said to him, "Joe..." because I'd already discovered his first name, and he knew mine. Why shouldn't I know his? I said to him, "Joe, do you want to watch the apology?" He said, "Oh yeah, I'd love to but I'm on duty." And I said, "Well, do you ever have a television set in ICU?" And he said, "Not very often." I said, "Who makes the decisions around here?" He said, "I suppose I do." I said, "That's terrific Joe. How long would it take?"

So anyway, we got the television set. I'm forever in his debt. Well, I probably am anyway, he's a medical person.

Of course, the TV had to be strategically placed because I couldn't get out of bed. It was down the end of my bed and fortunately the two people in beds next to me were happy to watch it and their nurses were too – it's one to one in ICU. And Joe watched it as well of course.

I was sitting there riveted. And then I looked up. Almost every nurse in the ward had deserted her patient and come to watch. And everyone was standing there with tears flowing down their face. I thought, "I wouldn't have believed this would happen six months ago, the language of respect wasn't there."

And that's what it's about – respect for everyone as an equal, with equal human rights and equal entitlements which we took away and now we've only taken the first step to returning them. Not giving them back, returning them.

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the
2008 Communities in Control Conference, convened by
Our Community & Centacare Catholic Family Services, June 2008
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic

So you can even have power messages when you're in ICU. And it's not because I was the former Premier that I got that TV. Well it might have been a little bit, but it was because I had the courage to ask. And anyway I wasn't much of a threat lying there flat on my back.

So for me this debate could be the bringing together of two important points of view, the global point of view – what is it made up of? Is it made up of people up there making decisions? What can it be made up of? A group of communities, the linking of people in power, in their kind of power, linking with our kind of power to create a greater power.

See, I've always had a very strange view of power. As a mum in the early days I had to bake cakes for the mothers' club fête. I see power as a bit like baking a cake. You bake a cake and there it is, all nicely baked, the family waiting to eat it. Some people have the view that if you take a slice of that cake and hand it to someone the actual amount of cake gets smaller.

My view is you cut the cake a bit smaller and you share it. And if you know those people are there, then you put more ingredients into the cake because you've got more people sharing and you make a bigger cake. And that's what we can do if we put global and local together.

So I now want to introduce the debaters, and I should tell you what the debate topic is – it is, *In the Face of the Enormity of Global Threats, Local Action is a Waste of Time*. “Boo hiss,” I hear in some parts of the audience. For the others I hear, “Yeah, I get dispirited by that sometimes too.” So I think it is a live debate in the community.

Now, people who are going to take the affirmative, that is that it *is* a waste of time, are Jenny McGregor and Meredith Carter. Can I tell you something about them before the debate begins and then I'll tell you something about those in the dissenting team?

In the Affirmative we first have the leader, Jenny McGregor. Jenny is the founding director and chief executive officer of the University of

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the
2008 Communities in Control Conference, convened by
Our Community & Centacare Catholic Family Services, June 2008
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic

Melbourne's Asialinks Centre, an organisation that promotes public understanding of the countries in Asia and of Australia's role in the region. It was in fact an organisation I think before its time and now hopefully has reached its time in terms of leadership.

Under her leadership, Asialink has become Australia's largest such centre, with an annual budget of more than \$8 million and activities throughout the region, spanning education, arts, media and corporate and public programs.

Jenny is also on the advisory board of the Asia Institute, the Dunlop Asia Awards, and a member of the APEC Women's Leader's Network. She's previously worked as a political adviser and senior manager in the Australian and Victorian Governments.

So please welcome Jenny.

On her team is a woman that I always like to have on my team and that's Meredith Carter. Meredith is CEO of Kindergarten Parents Victoria, the peak body for community managed kinders in Victoria. It promotes the voice of about 60,000 Victorian parents.

I don't know whether Meredith knows this but when I could see that I wasn't, with my team, going to win the 1992 election, my mind turned to what I really had to do before I left, and in part which community groups I had to make sure were still strong enough to stand up and be counted on social justice. I know it's a terrible thing to be thinking about but that's the thing I thought about.

And at that time KPV had just started and they didn't have a government grant. And I don't know whether the original people are still involved but when they came to see me they were very impressive. They said that they were going to give government hell if appropriate support wasn't provided for both the organisation and parents in kinders and their kids.

I thought "Hmm, an organisation that's going to give the next government hell. What a great idea!" So I funded them. Of course,

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the 2008 Communities in Control Conference, convened by Our Community & Centacare Catholic Family Services, June 2008
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic

they had excellent principles of equity and all those things. And it has really demonstrated its worth. And I'm so glad, and I know Meredith is, that early childhood services are now seen as absolute linchpins of children's growth and success. Many of us have worked for that for a long time.

But of course Meredith has only relatively recently become the Kindergarten Parents Victoria CEO. She's had more than 20 years experience at senior levels across the private, public and not-for-profit sector. She has a reputation for very effective advocacy and campaigns promoting law reform and community participation in policy development. I'm sure she would have been blown away by Fran's excellent presentation earlier this morning.

She trained as a lawyer. She has a diverse background in community affairs and I got to know her even better when she was an adviser to former Victorian Premier Steve Bracks on the social reform agenda and particularly A Fairer Victoria.

So please welcome Meredith.

And now I will introduce the speakers for the negative. Who's surprised that Deb Kilroy is speaking for the negative? Not me. Because do you know Deb's story? Some of you will.

You will recall that she won Community Idol around two, three years ago. I was given some words to say about Deb but I'm not going to say them. I've actually taken these from the back of her book.

I've read her fantastic book *Kilroy Was Here*. The back of that book says, "Deb Kilroy was locked up and abused at 13, a mother at 17, married to a celebrity footballer at 25, jailed for drug trafficking and witness to a violent murder at 28," in prison I think. "Just 12 years later she was awarded the Order of Australia for her fearless campaigning for the rights of women prisoners through her groundbreaking advocacy group Sisters Inside."

And I'm also pleased to welcome Ann Warner here who is the president of Sisters Inside.

"What set a decent working class kid out of control and into the care of the state so young? What enabled her to step off the merry-go-round of violence, drug dealing and imprisonment to remake her life? When she was jailed in 1989 she lost almost everything, not only her freedom, her husband, her two children and her home. Inside she was viciously stabbed and witnessed the murder of a friend.

"This tragedy marked a turning point in the beginning of her battle to turn her life around. After her release, Kilroy began a painstaking journey towards reconciliation with Joe and her children and fulfilling a promise.

"I said to the women in Boggo Road, 'I'll be back'. I believe that all you've got in this world is your word and nothing else. And if I can't keep my word I'm nobody'." The seeds of Sisters Inside were sown.

"Today Deb is light years away from who I was." That's her words. "Recognised internationally for founding the Sisters Inside, most recently the human rights medal, she is now..." and this book says, "studying to become a barrister", but she has now been admitted as a lawyer in Queensland.

So can we please say congratulations.

I remember my first meeting with Deb. A friend of mine, Molly Robson, an ex-colleague, pulled me across and said, "You've got to meet Deb." And I thought, "Wow, what a woman." And even then I didn't know what she did.

But when you see people the way Deb does, that is, see people as people with a contribution to make, you understand why with prisons we often get it so wrong. And Joe Caddy sees the same thing, that we lose respect for their ability to make a different future and therefore we treat them often in the wrong way. So welcome Deb.

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the
2008 Communities in Control Conference, convened by
Our Community & Centacare Catholic Family Services, June 2008
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic

She is joined by the other member of her team, Stella Young. I said to Stella yesterday she should be called Ms Achiever. She really is quite an extraordinary young woman and I've just had the pleasure of working with her on a committee.

She is a journalist. She's been a presenter on the award-winning *No Limits* television program on Melbourne's Channel 31. You probably saw her touring around here with a fellow worker on the camera.

I had a very interesting discussion with Stella one day and it was about the difficulties of getting a permanent job. Now, I know all the talent she's got but she was still having difficulty getting a permanent job. But she'd applied for a proper job at Melbourne Museum. To my absolute delight that was a permanent job and she got it.

And then to my absolute delight as a member of the Museum board I rocked up with my grandchildren to a circus performance they were putting on, and there she was drawing bees, telling jokes about bees. That's buzzing bees, not the other ones that we deal with every day. Real bees.

You never know how you're going to see Stella because one day I opened the newspaper and there she was sitting on her chair surrounded by roses, looking like the queen of the mardi gras festival.

She has worked as Communications Co-ordinator for Arts Access Victoria. I desperately needed her to coach me before I sang *I Love Rock and Roll* but I didn't know her then.

She's been a member of the Victorian Disability Advisory Council and the Ministerial Advisory Council for the Department of Victorian Communities. And she's currently a member of the board of Grit Media and the Steering Committee for the Youth Disability Advocacy Service.

She's a great advocate and she's a great woman. Please welcome Stella.

So now to begin the debate. Ten minutes each, lights down at nine, lights out at 10 – reminds me of nurse training. OK, first speaker for the Affirmative is Jenny McGregor. Jenny, welcome.

Jenny McGregor:

Ladies and Gentlemen, I do need to start with a warning and I'll return to this later. You, the audience, are the jury and our beloved former Premier is the adjudicator. So Meredith and I really need a fair trial here.

Therefore you need to understand the performance indicators right from the start. Rhonda told us to be funny and to be helpful, she has also given us the impossible position of persuading 1500 of you that local action is a waste of time.

80% of you come from grassroots organisations, and we're told you've all gone to a lot of trouble to come to a conference called Communities in Control.

Well, we would like you to take control. Take control of your heart as well as your head and give us a fair go. The warning is we know we're the underdog and we're asking you for objective judgements, and there will be more on that later.

The current coalition of global challenges has been described as a perfect storm – global warming, growing food and water shortages, growing threats of pandemics, more unstable states acquiring nuclear weapons, and the rise of terrorism.

And now we're told the Gulf Stream is cooling and may stop flowing completely. Last time this happened the world entered an ice age that lasted thousands of years.

So, if we're all headed for one of the nastiest levels of Dante's Inferno – remember Dante's hell with nine levels of horrible fates? One of them you are buried in ice up to your lower eyelashes. Imagine that, just staring out at the ice age all around you! – so if we're all going to

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the
2008 Communities in Control Conference, convened by
Our Community & Centacare Catholic Family Services, June 2008
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic

be starving, sick and frozen stiff, what on earth is the point of global action?

You can't wash your kids' footy clothes when you've got cholera or malaria from a global pandemic. There's no need to do the dishes if there's a global famine obviously. There's not a lot of point of having your legs waxed, your eyebrows plucked or even having a Brazilian if the ice age means there's no beach.

There's absolutely no doubt that local action, particularly housework and personal grooming, are a total waste of time.

Local action like harvesting your veggie scraps, composting your veggie scraps, harvesting your shower water, even downsizing from I'm sure all of you have Range Rovers to a new made in Australia hybrid Camry is worse than a waste of time. It's actually going to make you all feel better, in fact make you feel quite virtuous, and make not a whit of difference to the impending global catastrophe facing our children.

Just take China. With over 1.3 billion people, we all know that China is the world's largest and most populous country. One in every five people on the planet lives in China.

China builds a new city the size of Australia every year, but only 1% of the country's 560 million city dwellers breathe air considered safe by the European Union.

And of course China's problem is the world's problem. Sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide from China's coal fired power plants falls as acid rain on South Korea and Japan, and much of the particular pollution over the west coast of America comes from China.

By the end of this year China will overtake the US as the world's leading producer of greenhouse gases.

And I haven't even started on India. India will be the world's most populous country by 2030 and is also growing at historically

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the
2008 Communities in Control Conference, convened by
Our Community & Centacare Catholic Family Services, June 2008
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic

unprecedented rates with similar environmental challenges for the globe.

So what's the use of local action here in Melbourne, Australia or even more useless in Kororua? We could close down Australia tomorrow and make 1.8% of difference to global emissions.

And what about world food shortages, ladies and gentlemen? One in six countries in the world now face food shortages because of a severe drought that will become semi-permanent under climate change.

The World Bank believes that 33 countries are in danger of being destabilised by food price inflation. And UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon says that higher food prices are wiping out progress towards reducing poverty and will harm global security.

The President of the World Bank says that food inflation could push 100 million people back into poverty, obliterating the gains of a decade of economic growth. More than 800 million people still go hungry at night. Even in India, where the green revolution made some of its biggest strides, 50% of children in rural areas are malnourished.

At the other end of the scale, the second richest country on earth, Japan, is now experiencing food shortages that saw Tokyo run out of butter this year. A 130% rise in the global cost of wheat in the past year, caused partly by surging demand from China and India, is threatening Japanese food supplies.

In April, the Japanese government discovered it had exhausted its \$2.37 billion budget for wheat two months before the end of the financial year. It was forced to call on \$541 million worth of reserves to ensure it could continue to feed the Japanese nation.

Japanese food experts said this was the first time the government has had to take such drastic action since the War – that's nearly 60 years ago.

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the
2008 Communities in Control Conference, convened by
Our Community & Centacare Catholic Family Services, June 2008
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic

But with not even 21 million people in Australia, barely 3% of the world's population, it's hardly even worth us giving up our quest to be world leaders in obesity and binge drinking. Why shouldn't we live on cakes and alcopops and drive our four wheel drives till the lights go out on planet Earth?

Let me share with you a personal case study on what a total waste of time local action really is. In the mid-1980s when Rhonda Galbally ran the Commission for the Future and I worked there, the Commission ran a visionary project on climate change. Our colleagues made a film, together with CSIRO scientists, that was every bit as powerful as Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*.

Our film won a UN environment award and we all thought the world would start to change. The Commission for the Future employed someone to work on carbon trading, some weird economist concept that no normal person had heard of in 1987.

The logic of the film and the logic of carbon trading was unarguable. But no-one was listening. Local action, and this was Australian local action not local local action, was a total waste of time. Actually, local action is often much worse than a waste of time. It is positively dangerous.

Sidney Jones is a colleague of mine who lives in Indonesia, works for the International Crisis Group and is the world expert on Jemaah Islamiyah. Remember JI? They're the guys responsible for the Bali bombing, the attacks on the Australian Embassy in Jakarta and the Hilton Hotel bombing.

Sidney Jones describes how JI are so much more than a terrorist network. It's a local social network, sort of like the Country Women's Association. The children attend schools together, the mothers shop and cook and chat together, the families play together.

So taking out the leaders of JI, as Indonesia has successfully done in recent times, leaves behind a robust community association, well set up to produce a new generation of terrorists – local action at its most

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the
2008 Communities in Control Conference, convened by
Our Community & Centacare Catholic Family Services, June 2008
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic

productive. They might even be picking up a few tips from the Our Community website I thought.

Similarly, in India, where I've been focusing in the last few years, local action so often stops development that would improve sanitation, public health and standards of living. In the interests of preserving the status quo, local action is precisely why India lags so far behind China in bringing its people out of poverty.

And before I leave India and China and security, what about what might be the biggest global challenge facing us all – running out of water. The scientists tell us we're now in a permanent state of demand for water outstripping supply. This is no cyclical drought scenario.

The US now sees water as a national security issue. China is putting in a giant pipeline to divert water from the Tibetan Himalayas so they can make sunglasses, toys and microwave ovens for the world.

India has 24 million water bores right now. I go back to my earlier point, what is the use of me pouring my shower on my veggies?

What is local action anyway? I don't even understand what it is anymore. I used to believe 'think global, act local'. But globalisation is happening so fast I don't even know how to define local. The people I work with work with communities of colleagues all over the world.

So this is an example of 21st Century local action, us working together online with our colleagues. What about cyberspace? There are 1.6 million people using the World Wide Web already. And what about Barak Obama raising \$300 million for his campaign, with 80% raised online?

Ladies and Gentlemen, all this goes to prove that ourcommunity.com.au is the virtual place to be. You don't see anyone under 30 without a full-on Facebook or MySpace presence. We all need to recognise the power of the cyber world and get in there to

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the
2008 Communities in Control Conference, convened by
Our Community & Centacare Catholic Family Services, June 2008
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic

make a real difference to the only issues that really count: human survival and global equity.

Joan Kirner:

And the first speaker in dissent is Deb Kilroy.

Debbie Kilroy:

Joan says she's neutral and yet she's sitting on the other side.

Joan Kirner:

You know I always sit on the right!

Debbie Kilroy:

You said it, not me.

Before I start I do want to acknowledge that we're on Aboriginal land, the Wurundjeri people, and I thank Auntie Joy yesterday for her beautiful welcome to country and I accept her invitation to be here today on the Wurundjeri people's land.

I want to thank Our Community as well for the invite and acknowledge colleagues in the audience that I work with, both in Queensland and across the country. And even my local soccer team member is here as well I just discovered.

I also want to acknowledge if there are any women here that have been criminalised and spent time in prison – I'd like to hear your voice and what you think on the matter of local action, local issues in regards to global threats.

I know when you're sitting in a prison cell you're not thinking too much about what's happening over in Bali or the ice age really. You're thinking about what's happening to you on a day-to-day, minute-to-minute basis and the brutality that you're experiencing.

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the 2008 Communities in Control Conference, convened by Our Community & Centacare Catholic Family Services, June 2008 www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic

And with 1500 of you wonderful people here that work in the community sector, the other team is saying that what we do means nothing, absolutely nothing, and I know you as well as I disagree, that every minute of our lives and the passion that we hold, and the work that we do absolutely means everything to each and every one of us and to the people that we walk with in the community.

I'm going to tell a bit of a story about Sisters Inside because Sisters Inside is known around Australia and overseas. It started with a handful of women, of voiceless and powerless women on the south side of Brisbane about 16 years ago.

Women in prison have no voice, they have no liberty physically or psychologically. But at that time in Brisbane a movement to take some control grew directly out of the prison experience of myself and other women.

It was limited control, sure. But it was about opportunity to get an education, to get a job, to keep in contact with our families, to keep our children so they weren't removed by the state.

And it worked because it was not about individualism or ego. We had a progressive government and administration at that time that made that possible in Queensland. But it is effective because it was in the hands of the women themselves. We had control, we had the power. And it was local action and still is.

The organisation that grew from it, Sisters Inside, was successful because it worked from within the hearts and souls of the women ourselves. It was conceived as an organisation run for women in prison by women in prison.

We knew what we wanted and what we needed and that's what Sisters Inside provided, as we still do today, whether it's sexual assault counselling, drug and alcohol counselling, employment training, post release support, connection with children, youth workers to work with young people who are in detention centres.

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the
2008 Communities in Control Conference, convened by
Our Community & Centacare Catholic Family Services, June 2008
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic

Sisters Inside has always and still is run by a committee of women in prison as well as on the outside.

The inside steering committee of that organisation, my organisation, our organisation of women prisoners, is the beating heart of the organisation. It informs everything we do and how we do it. So even if we're in prison with ice up to our eyeballs, we will still decide how we're going to get rid of the ice.

In this way it is truly in the hands of those it serves, the women. In this way it stays true to its vision. It's authentic, it reflects the real experiences of us as women and it is true to them.

Since then the organisation has grown and prospered, offering a wider range of services as I described just before. And we also advocate for the human rights of women in the criminal justice system, a broader advocacy role that we didn't actually intend to take on or have that vision earlier on, back when we were sitting in prison, where we have, over the years, dragged the reality of prisons into the wider consciousness of the public and even here today.

In my time inside prison I saw daily and unforgettably how the words 'human rights' can seem ludicrous to someone whose experience leaves you feeling barely human anymore. Sisters Inside has successfully brought the fundamental lack of human rights in women's prisons to the fore – in public inquiries across several jurisdictions in this country, Queensland, Victoria, New South Wales, and more recently tabled in Parliament in the Northern Territory last Friday, reviews and investigations into the abuses of women in prison across these jurisdictions; in a best-selling book; in a human rights medal; an Order of Australia; and through an international network of associations that we work with very closely.

Of course there is always resistance to local action, as we all know, and ours has come in all shapes and sizes, but none larger than the current Minister for Corrections in our state, Judy Spence.

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the
2008 Communities in Control Conference, convened by
Our Community & Centacare Catholic Family Services, June 2008
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic

Sisters Inside has so rattled her cage that she has tried several avenues to make the organisation go away, disappear, be silenced, have no voice. In one of these she succeeded in preventing the management committee from holding its regular monthly meetings with the steering committee of women inside the women's prison.

If she thought this would magically bring about our disappearance she was gravely wrong, because the grass roots, the local action will always be there and we've found other ways to communicate. If it's not face-to-face through monthly management meetings it's through many other avenues that she has not been able to stop and she will not stop.

We're in touch with what the women need and we're proud of our local action. We're proud of our grass roots organisation and women feel proud to be part of that. We're not going anywhere fast.

Governments come and go. Ministers come and go. But we're here for the long run, as you all are in your day-to-day work with the people that you walk with. And we will survive, because unlike Minister Spence our approach is not power over anyone. It's power with the women, with the women we walk with.

It's about local action and I have to tell you I don't think it's a waste of time. And that's what grass roots organisations are all about and where the high majority of you in this room come from, and believe in. That's why you're here participating, and of course no doubt going to vote against the other side.

It's interesting. We've had conversations, myself with Anne Warner and Pat Turner over the last couple of days, because we're in the same motel, talking about this debate and remembering Minister Spence, it brought into the forefront of our minds Burma's military junta. In Burma, people have been prevented from banding together by the junta, which has the power right now.

But all tyrannies eventually overreach themselves, like Spence, like the junta. Grass roots organisations in Burma, its monks for that

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the
2008 Communities in Control Conference, convened by
Our Community & Centacare Catholic Family Services, June 2008
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic

matter, are about meeting people's needs, and will triumph exactly because of that. They cannot separate them from the people, as we will not be separated from women in prison in this country and around the world.

And that's what some people try to do, who take their power and use it in an abusive way. This is what global threats are all about, misuse of power.

In the end, grass roots organisations, local action, will always triumph. It may take time but particularly in times of crisis and in a world of crisis, local action will flourish, not diminish. All of us here are thriving. There are over a thousand people here, 1500 I think. We will not be turned away from those that we work with, those that we believe it's an approach of 'power with', not 'power over'.

And as long as we stay in touch with people's needs, represent people's needs, share people's needs and walk with people, we'll always be there and be effective.

It's interesting that on the other side, Jenny seems to be quite confused about the debate point because she seems to have got globalisation confused with global climate change, and they are two separate things, as we know, from local action. And there are different things that we need to take in account working at that grass roots level and in local action.

Local action is 'power with' and not 'power over'. We don't take threats lightly but we will stand up to them and we will mow them down in any small or large way we can as a community sector.

Now, the lights haven't been dimmed for me so I'm just going to come to an end. I don't know who said this but I'm happy for someone to tell me who did. I thought it's quite relevant at this moment. And that is, "Silence is complicity and speaking out is about change". And all of us from the grass roots, from local action groups, we talk and we are about change.

A threat will always be a threat, whether it's local or global. It doesn't really matter because we're not scared of it.

Thank you.

Joan Kirner:

And of course Deb would never make a threat, never.

Debbie Kilroy:

No, a promise.

Joan Kirner:

Thanks very much Deb. That was fantastic. And now I'd like to welcome to the debating team Meredith Carter, who speaks on behalf of the Affirmative.

Meredith Carter:

You've listened to our opponents and they've tried to muddy the waters by focusing on issues that are irrelevant to the main purpose of the debate.

They think local action is great... Of course so do I – my day job is all about the importance of local action on the local scene. Kindergarten Parents Victoria – get it.

But let's get back to the real issue here – which is, is the resolution we are debating true? And our message to you is yes, it is true. Of course it is true. In the face of the enormity of global threats local action is a waste of time. Think about it for a minute – think about this: why are we debating this topic now? Because, as Jenny has outlined, the global threats facing us are enormous. And well-targeted *political* action is what is urgently required to deal with them. Local action may make you feel better, it may even do some good, but it isn't enough. Not nearly enough.

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the
2008 Communities in Control Conference, convened by
Our Community & Centacare Catholic Family Services, June 2008
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic

Our philosophy is that global threats demand political action, frequently global political action.

Let me expand on an example close to home – oil prices. This is a hot topic, with media polls demanding Rudd “do something” – but as Jon Faine asked yesterday – “What?”

People are turning to local action – riding their bikes, public transport, electric cars, and the Federal Government is pitching in with fuel watch. But what makes a real difference to fuel prices? Global threats.

Every time George Bush threatens to invade Iran, globally fuel prices soar. Fuel watch isn’t going to do much about that. The Federal Government admits as much. It’s calling for global *political action* on what it nominates along with rising food prices as the most significant challenge facing *the global economy*.

In yesterday’s *Age* newspaper [16/6/08] Kevin Rudd wants “the blow torch” applied to OPEC to force the world’s top oil producers to boost output – political action. And it seems Saudi Arabia is thinking about boosting output by some absurd amount but guess what – even local action by the Saudis will have minimal impact on petrol pump prices in Australia. What else might help? A new president in the US to help cool down the Middle East crisis – that might help – go Obama!

But we also need to get very serious, because as my colleague has eloquently described to you when we are talking about global threats, political action is necessary to ensure human survival in very many cases.

Our health is central to the ability to live and to thrive so I want to focus on the need for political action on health. We can make Australia a fairer, healthier place for all Australians. That would be a good thing, but it is not enough. Children would continue to die across the world of preventable health conditions like diarrhoea and malaria. In addition, diseases like tuberculosis are on the rise again – in large

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the
2008 Communities in Control Conference, convened by
Our Community & Centacare Catholic Family Services, June 2008
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic

part due to continued inability to afford complete treatment of tuberculosis amongst marginalised populations.

As the World Health Assembly President Scheel said in 1951 “*The world cannot remain half healthy and half sick and still maintain its economic, moral and spiritual equilibrium.*” Like organisations from the World Health Organisation to the Rockefeller Foundation, our team argues that we need political action to produce global equity in health.

I’m not even going to start on the 418 billion people across the world infected with hepatitis, and the despair expressed in BIOMEDICINE [9/6/07] that the unrecognised importance, danger, and costs of hepatitis in the 21st Century cannot be understated or underestimated.

Let's put local action on the scales and weigh it up against some of these threats. Will local action really ensure people around the globe survive and thrive in the face of these things? Unless it's also well targeted political action – no it won't.

These are issues of human survival and of social justice that we cannot ignore. And in the face of the desperate need and knowledge that local action is not enough, in these circumstances local action alone may well be immoral.

HIV/AIDS is yet another continuing global problem that demands urgent political solutions. Developing an HIV vaccine is described by many in the field as one of the world's most urgent global scientific priorities. There are 33 million people living with HIV, up from around 8 million in 1990. The numbers continue to grow. But of the millions of people in immediate need of life-saving AIDS drugs; less than 30% are receiving the drugs. Behind these numbers are millions of personal tragedies – many of those infected are young mothers – they and their countries have to decide do we save the mothers or save the child? Usually they try to save the child so mothers only get the drugs while they're pregnant – once the child is born the mother dies. It means 12 million African children are AIDS orphans, half a

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the
2008 Communities in Control Conference, convened by
Our Community & Centacare Catholic Family Services, June 2008
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic

million children are born with HIV each year. It is tearing apart the basic fabric of society in many developing countries.

So in addition to human survival we are also talking about global equity. Global political action is desperately needed to make the world a healthier and more equitable place. That's why the World Health Organisation slogan is *Better Health for All*.

And if the unfairness and immorality of failure to act globally to help those less able to help themselves is not sufficiently persuasive, let me make it more concrete for you. If global threats are not attacked where they arise they grow and threaten us all. TB, for example, is not only an immediate health emergency for affected populations – the people living and dying with these illnesses in other countries. Their inability to afford complete treatment is leading to growing rates of drug resistant TB in the Western world as well. TB is also back in Australia, where it is increasingly unresponsive to the barrage of heavy duty antibiotics we have available. So drug resistant TB will and is spreading in Australia and simply trying to treat infected individuals or even communities that are here is really putting our heads in the sand.

Global health problems are threats to us too not only in health terms. The rise in diseases like TB and hepatitis, along with the ongoing scourge of diseases like HIV/AIDS, also represent broader risks. Like other global inequities in health not only do they decimate families but they undermine economic productivity because the labour force is sick. They feed a vicious circle of poverty and social alienation that can foster violence, helping ultimately to destabilise whole countries, threatening us all.

That's the nature of global threats. If you don't act on them *where they arise*, global threats represent serious risks to us all. As the World Health Organisation argued in 1951, on top of all the other arguments, it's a matter of global equilibrium. It's the interconnectedness of global threats that means acting locally is not enough. We live in a global village and we have to deal with global threats by acting not just globally but by completely rethinking the

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the
2008 Communities in Control Conference, convened by
Our Community & Centacare Catholic Family Services, June 2008
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic

nature of action – urgently. The world has to become a healthier and fairer place for all its citizens, increasing security for all people and improving the chances of those worst off.

So what can make a difference? International sanctions, increased international aid, reform of international patenting laws to ensure the drugs are actually affordable in poor countries – all of these things help. And well-targeted action in cyber space is one of the ways to go.

So if you really want to make a difference in the face of these enormous global threats, make sure it's well-targeted political action and do some of it in cyberspace – go to the avert website and make a difference to an AIDS orphan today.

Thank you.

Joan Kirner:

Do you know what, Meredith? I think you should continue to make a difference by joining Fran and being on one of the World Health Organisation committees. That would be terrific I think, don't you? She'd be a great advocate for us.

OK, and last but certainly not least we have Stella Young for the negative.

Stella Young:

Ladies and Gentlemen, when asked to debate today the issue at hand I felt overwhelmed by how on earth I could argue something that makes so much bloody sense! How on earth would anyone suggest any other view than the one I've been asked to argue? Because it made so much sense, I had no idea what I was going to say. But I knew Rhonda wouldn't be pleased if I got up here and said "in the face of such enormous global threats, local action is a waste of time – NOT". So I pulled my socks up and started thinking about why I know local action is important.

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the
2008 Communities in Control Conference, convened by
Our Community & Centacare Catholic Family Services, June 2008
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic

Firstly, it can't exist without community.

When we think about community, what do we think of? Are we just part of the community in which we geographically reside? Or is it something more than that? Someone posed that question to me recently, and it got me thinking about the fact that I belong to a lot of communities. A community of people who go and see a particular band. A community of people who do their shopping at South Richmond Coles. A community of people who are bit obsessed with knitting – oh hey, come on. I'm a cripple. Craft is my spiritual home!

So I'm a music lover, I live in Richmond, I like to knit, but what else defines my community? Is it the way I look? I went home to the small town in country Victoria where my parents live for Easter, sporting a new haircut, and my Dad said "huh, Stell, you're looking a bit emo". Once I got over the shock that my Dad knew what an emo was, I looked at him and I said "Dad, don't be ridiculous. I'm not an emo.... there is no wheelchair access on the steps of Flinders Street Station."

But all jokes aside, a community I feel a strong connection to is the disability community. And I don't want to open up that old debate about whether there is or isn't a disability community, but to me, there's something. When I pass another wheelchair user on the street, there's that nod of understanding, a smile of recognition. A 'what up brother' to my fellow wheelchair users. I didn't always feel this way.

As a young girl with a disability, I didn't think I was one of you. I wanted to be successful in exactly the same ways my able bodied peers wanted to be successful. And growing up in that small town, I didn't have any idea that someone with a disability could be those things. I knew / could be though, as long as I never admitted I was one of you.

That all kind of fell apart when I discovered the world of local action. I made friends with another girl who used a chair. For me, that was OK. I could justify being her friend because we shared a particular

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the
2008 Communities in Control Conference, convened by
Our Community & Centacare Catholic Family Services, June 2008
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic

genetic trait. But little did I know, she was about to introduce me to the world of doing stuff about the things I didn't like. All of a sudden she was carting me off to International Day of People with a Disability BBQs, and meetings of Women With Disabilities Networks. She was giving me books about the social model of disability and teaching me about the history of the fight. Yes, it was quite a realisation that I have the life I have because other people fought for me to have it.

Now, I'm not at all trying to suck up to the adjudicator. But she is one of the people who fought. And something she did changed my place in the world.

Spurred on by her own experience of a good education, and then her experience as a mother who wanted her children to have a quality education, Joan Kirner took on, in her role in Parliament, responsibility for all children in Victoria. I can remember my Mum and Dad sitting with me watching television one Saturday night, and a lady came on the TV. She was on the ABC so I knew it was a show to be taken seriously. This lady was introduced and she came on stage, opened her mouth and sang "I love rock and roll" at the top of her lungs. Mum and Dad started laughing and chatting about what a "good stick" she must be. I asked who this lady all dressed up in leather was. And my Mum said, "She's Joan Kirner, she's the reason you can go to school with other kids."

I should have realised how important local action was then.

Now that I'm older and slightly wiser, I not only feel an amazing connection to people who share my lived experience, I engage in local action every day, sometimes with others, and sometimes just by myself. When those ticket inspectors won't check my ticket on the train, I chase them! When they won't check my ticket going through the barrier, I sit quietly and explain my rights and responsibilities as a citizen. You'd think I'd have driven them round the bend by now.

I'm lucky enough to work at the Museum, where I engage with different communities every day. One of my favourite communities is the 3-12 year old dinosaur obsessed set. To a five-year-old boy, there

If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the
2008 Communities in Control Conference, convened by
Our Community & Centacare Catholic Family Services, June 2008
www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic

is nothing better than a dinosaur. A dinosaur is exactly like a woman will be when he's 15. But I get to do more than foster a love of dinosaurs. At least once a day, way more on school holidays, a child asks me why I'm small and funny looking. I give them a straightforward explanation, and sometimes the conversation goes on. Like with the little girl who said, "You're little like that lady in the *Incredibles*". We had a chat about it, and then she said "I have some good news for you." I said "and what's your good news." She put her hand on my arm and she said "I really like little people, and everyone else who looks funny." Very good news for us all I'd say!

But our opposing team is right, there are threats, big threats. Climate change is a huge threat. I know it's not going to solve the problem on its own, but I turned off my hairdryer and my kettle and my heater at the switch when I left this morning. The cynics will say that's not enough, and therefore it's not worth doing. We here in this room know different. With solidarity we will conquer!

I look around this room and I see that it's full to the brim of people who work in the community sector every day, some who have done so for many years. It's not for the money, or the glory, so why do we do it? Is it possible, just a bit, that local action is fun? That we do it because it gives us a sense of fighting for something? Perhaps we do it so that one day, even if they don't know we're responsible for it, someone else will be able to do something the generation before them couldn't, and it'll be because of us. Besides, how much fun would it be if we all threw up our hands and let these global threats just sweep us away? Bugger that!

However charming our opposing team might be, trying to woo you with their talk of hopelessness, I urge you to think back to how you felt yesterday when you heard Tim Flannery speaking about possibly the biggest global threat to face the planet in ... well, maybe forever. And how did you feel when you sat before the amazing Pat Turner this morning. Did you feel hopeless? Like local action is a waste of time? Or did you feel impressed by what these amazing advocates, our fellow human beings, have achieved, and will continue to fight

for? Anyone who wasn't impressed can rack off now – you're not my people!

In closing, these challenges we face are big. Really big. But past generations have faced challenges too. A hundred and fifty years ago, we couldn't imagine an Australia where women could vote. Now we can't imagine what a disaster it would be if we didn't! Let us all remember what Nelson Mandela said – “Those who are ready to join hands can overcome the greatest challenges.”

Thank you.

Joan Kirner:

I just want to finish by thanking the participants. It was really terrific to hear the different points of view. And I still go with my original opening, that it's two parts of the whole, global action and local action are still two parts of the whole.

And I want to thank the audience for their participation. And I have to say Stella your performance was outstanding and I do wish you'd be my singing and drama coach.

And may I finish with these words. I talked about power at the start and I want to finish with talking about just using the words those young people used so movingly. A happy mob is a strong mob. Now you're all a happy mob. Let's go out and be a strong mob.

Thank you.