

RAPBS Introductory speech for Call to Account:

We are meeting today to call to account the Australian government for its role in the perpetration of grave violations of the human rights of asylum seekers and refugees both in detention centres and in the precarious conditions outside them, under other unlivable terms, like the temporary protection visas.

We commence by acknowledging that we are on usurped and unconceded Aboriginal land. This Indigenous land from which we speak is inscribed with layered histories of settler-colonial violence, occupation and ongoing theft of Indigenous sovereignty. We remember that unjust incarceration, quarantined penal islands, physical and psychological torture practiced with impunity, and the classification of some lives as worthless and less-than-human: all of these find their points of origin in such charged sites of settler-colonial occupation.

In this International Human Rights Week we call attention to the rights that Australian governments have long declared are important to be respected by all, regardless of who we are or how we came to Australia. Successive governments have ratified a range of UN human rights treaties, including the Refugee Convention that offers protection for those seeking asylum from persecution, the Convention on the Rights of the Child that guarantees children access to education, care and freedom from imprisonment, and the Convention against Torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading forms of treatment and punishment. The Australian government has prided itself on its adherence to these tenets that are essential to membership in the international community. But its actions towards refugees and towards those seeking asylum are not consistent with these obligations and responsibilities.

So today, each of us, members of the Australian polity, call our government to account. It is impossible to enumerate in full all the individual acts that evidence the government's clear flouting of both the spirit and letter of international human rights. We therefore limit ourselves to a representative catalogue beginning with the second incarnation of the Pacific Solution in 2012 – a deliberately punitive policy which has been expressly designed to deter at any cost – including at the cost of the very lives of those ensnared in your sovereign borders.

We also confine ourselves today only to events listed on the public record. Numerous other instances remain unnamed.