

# 25 YEARS OF REFUGEE RESISTANCE



AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF  
THE REFUGEE MOVEMENT  
FROM 2000 - 2025

# ABOUT THIS EXHIBITION

FOR OVER 25 YEARS, REFUGEES, ASYLUM SEEKERS AND THEIR SUPPORTERS HAVE RESISTED THE RACIST ANTI-REFUGEE POLICIES OF SUCCESSIVE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENTS.

The Refugee Action Collective (RAC) was established in 2000 amidst a rising tide of racism against refugees by politicians and the media. We recognise this exhibition is being held on the stolen lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. Sovereignty was never ceded.

Resistance has come in many forms. Refugees have penned open letters, staged protests from inside detention, organised breakouts, held hunger strikes and attempts at resisted repression and silencing. Refugees have held encampments (lasting 100 days) and walked from Naarm (Melbourne) to Canberra bringing resistance to the doorstep of politicians.

Supporters have rallied in the thousands and, at times, tens of thousands. Activists have occupied. Community members have held vigils. Unionists have blocked deportations. Teachers have walked off the job. We have held forums, stalls and media events.

The movement has turned public opinion, bringing about small, but important victories.

Other forms of resistance have included music, art, poetry, film and books. This exhibition scrapes the surface of the countless acts of resistance by refugees and asylum seekers.

Contrary to racist myths, refugees are a highly resourceful group of people, forced by persecution to flee their countries of origin.

It is Australia's greatest shame that, instead of welcoming refugees with open arms, successive governments policies dictate that refugees are indefinitely locked up and tortured in offshore detention centres. 14 men have died offshore. Countless more lives have been destroyed.

Australia is a global leader of cruelty to refugees, inspiring far right Governments the world over and racist movements at home.

But it isn't a crime to seek asylum, whatever their mode of arrival. Despite attempts to mercilessly demonise and dehumanise them, refugees' resistance and assertion of their inherent dignity continues, whether in Australia, Nauru, PNG or Indonesia.

Refugee supporters must continue to fan the flames of this resistance, to end this horror once and for good.

**-Refugee Action Collective Victoria, November 2025**

# RESISTING HOWARD 2000-2007

In 2001, Liberal Prime Minister John Howard used the small influx of refugees arriving to Australia by boat to construct a political crisis about boat arrivals. He imposed cruel, racist border control measures and justified it on the basis of “saving lives at sea”, whipping up anti-refugee racism in the lead-up to the 2001 election.

Howard’s cruelty to refugees was epitomised in three events: the ‘Tampa affair’, the sinking of a fishing boat (SIEV-X) carrying hundreds of refugees and the ‘Children Overboard’ scandal, where Howard and his ministers circulated vicious, racist lies about refugees throwing children overboard. Howard famously declared, ‘We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come’. Tragically, during the Tampa crisis the Parliamentary Labor Party supported every move by the Liberals to toughen laws against asylum seekers.

Dozens of activist groups formed around the country. Rallies were held in the CBD, addressed by trade union officials, the Greens and Labor MPs, with some events, such as the 2002 Palm Sunday rally, mobilising up to 25,000 people. Supporters also organised solidarity actions at onshore detention centres, including Woomera and later Baxter detention centre in SA, resulting in the powerful breakout in 2002.

By the time Howard was booted from power, every state branch of the Labor party carried Labor for Refugee resolutions at their respective state conferences. Coming into power in 2007 on the back of this wave of anti-Howard, pro-refugee sentiment, then Labor PM Kevin Rudd scrapped the system of offshore detention that Howard had introduced, whilst, to his shame, keeping other parts of the racist deterrence architecture in place, paving the way for betrayal in 2012.

# THE TAMPA AFFAIR



Photo by AAP / Catharine Munro

On 26 August 2001, a routine surveillance flight by Coastwatch revealed the presence of a fishing boat northwest of Christmas Island. The vessel was carrying 433 asylum seekers en route to Australia before it broke down. The following day Australian Search and Rescue (AusSAR) broadcast a call to any merchant ships in the vicinity to render assistance to the stricken vessel. A Norwegian freighter, the MV Tampa, responded to the call, intercepting the vessel and bringing its passengers aboard. The Australian Government refused to allow the Tampa to dock at Christmas Island.

Howard then had emergency laws passed to excise Christmas Island and other coastal islands from Australia's migration zone to prevent any asylum seekers on the Tampa and boat-arrivals thereafter applying for refugee status. He also sought to make refugees lives in detention as miserable as possible to 'deter' others.

Howard used this racism to win the 2001 election, convincing a large section of the population to accept his lies about refugees being "illegals", posing a threat to jobs and living standards.

# THE WOOMERA BREAKOUT



Opened in 1999, Woomera detention center was located in South Australia, in the middle of nowhere, almost 500 kilometres north of Adelaide in the central Australian desert. Refugees were isolated from the public and subjected to overcrowding and appalling conditions. For the first six months, detainees couldn't access a telephone. The awful conditions at the centre led to regular protests.

In March 2002, 1000 activists from around the country converged in Woomera as part of the Festival Of Freedom— a tour of actions held around the desert town organized jointly by urban activists and local Kokatha and Arabunna peoples. Hundreds of activists bussed in from Melbourne and Sydney or drove from Brisbane and Perth to camp in the desert for three days outside the centre.

On the first evening, supporters received a request from refugees to march towards the centre, whilst refugees held their own protest inside. Protestors unexpectedly broke through the perimeter fence to come face to face with the detainees. Refugees were screaming and yelling “We are human”, “We are not animals”. Supporters joined them in chanting and shaking the fence. A gap was created and a break out was on. Over the night and the next few days, refugee supporters, completely unprepared, did their best to help refugees to evade capture.

The Woomera breakout was one of the most remarkable and successful civil disobedience actions in Australia. It had the effect of galvanising large sections of the public to join what was a growing campaign across the country against the Howard Government's vicious racism against refugees. Three years on, public opinion had turned against Howard. Where in 2001, 70 per cent of the public supported his actions in keeping out refugees from the Tampa, in 2005 there was majority support for allowing refugees to stay.

# BAXTER DETENTION CENTRE



Submitted by Sylvie Leber - published by the Australian Jewish Democratic Society

The Baxter Detention Centre in South Australia was used for the mandatory detention of asylum seekers between 2002-2007. In 2003 detainees protested and set fire to the facilities over the Easter Weekend protests. This happened again with worse results in 2005, but then Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone said that acts of vandalism and self harm by asylum seekers were “unattractive” protest measures.

These protests united the struggle of those inside the detention centre with the fight of Australians who traveled from across the country to camp near the site for the weekend, adding their voices to this movement. Sylvie Leber attended the three-day 2003 Baxter convergence. This is an extract from her diary notes.

*“We were a mixed crowd. I enjoyed seeing the colorful appearance of the passionate young people. The Desert Rats without Borders, feral anarchist punks, were the most visually striking group, dressed in black, interesting tattoos, intricate hair designs, body piercing, some men wearing kilts and a few wearing black bandanas over their mouth and nose. The Greens added an air of respectability. There were several sprightly older women, a couple of New Romantic-looking fellows from the VCA, Melbourne’s elite art school, and many 30 and 40 something women who had left their partners and children behind. The array of T-shirt messages was to be constantly stimulating and entertaining.*”

*There were the Queers for Refugees, Rural Australians for Refugees, the Radical Cheer Squad who never failed to amuse with their witty routines. Food not Bombs were impressive providing yummy vegetarian food made from “found food”. No One is Illegal had organized the water truck; the Refugee Action Collective organized the concert. Indymedia set up the media tent*

*Yesterday a plain-clothes policeman with a backpack had been recognized by one of the local aborigines who had formerly been a policeman himself.”*

**READ MORE**



# RUDD'S BETRAYAL 2007-2012

In 2008, after Labor got into office, they ended detention on Nauru. However, the party continued to support mandatory detention (est. 1992), indefinite detention (1994) offshore processing and used exaggerated, hypocritical rhetoric around “people smuggling”.

Yet if Labor was really concerned about refugees being exploited by people smugglers, the solution is to provide safer pathways for asylum and to rescue any boats at sea. In reality, the tough on people smuggler rhetoric acted as cover for racism that said refugees coming by boat were “illegals” “que-jumpers” trying to get in through “the back door”. But there is no orderly queue to seeking asylum. People have the right to seek asylum irrespective of their mode of transport. People smugglers provide a desperate service to people fleeing persecution.

Shamefully, since 13 August 2012, with a new influx of boats and the refugee movement demobilised, Labor backflipped. Under Rudd and Gillard, Labor resumed sending people to Nauru and Manus Island under a policy of “offshore processing”. The purpose of dumping people in such remote locations is to deny them proper legal support, medical services and contact with the Australian public. Nauru is 3000 kilometres from the Australian mainland, while Manus Island lies 300 kilometres north of the main island of Papua New Guinea.

Refugees' resistance began almost instantly. On September 6 2012, refugees held on Christmas Island released a letter, "**Why we don't want to go to Nauru or Papua New Gini**". A month later, on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2012, refugees on Nauru released a petition calling for their cases get heard as soon as possible, requesting urgent medical care and demanding the UN be allowed to visit to see their situation.

Since 19 July 2013, the Government's policy is that no refugee who comes by boat will ever be resettled in Australia. At its national conference in 2015, Labor went further to the right, after leader Bill Shorten won support for the turn-back of asylum boats. It underlines the importance of declaring, whenever refugees try to seek safety by boat: **Let them land, let them stay!**

Nauru refugees Camp:

NAURU.

17.10.2012

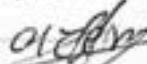
To whom Concerns,


We are the refugees in Nauru Regional processing Centers, And We are Complaining about the our dificeled Situation in Nauru Regional processing Center in now And We have real important demands;

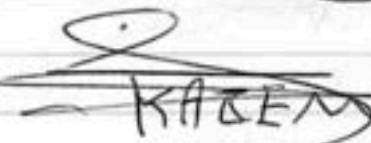
- \* We want our processing cases being started as soon as possible
- \* We need Medical care for us on the moment.
- \* We need S, C, R, C, Commissions visit every week here
- \* We want the United Nations to come and see our situation and they should be stay here
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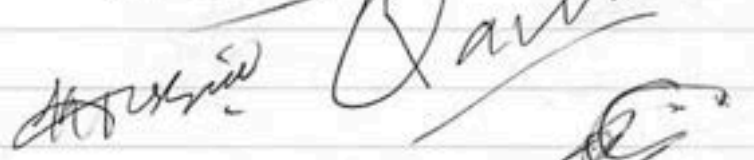
Thanking you...

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KAREN



## PETITION FROM REFUGEES ON NAURU - 2012

# RESISTING ABBOTT & TURNBULL - 2013-2019

Tony Abbott led the Coalition to election victory over Kevin Rudd and Labor in September 2013. One of his first acts was to launch Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB), aimed at stopping arrivals by sea. In the following months, a third of the people arriving by boat were sent to Manus Island in PNG, a third to Nauru and a third came to Australia via Christmas Island. Responsibility for OSB fell to the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, Scott Morrison, and later to Peter Dutton. "On water matters" became shrouded in secrecy. Orange lifeboats were used to turn people back.

In November 2014, Morrison announced that Australia would not accept any refugees in transit in Indonesia who applied through the UNHCR for resettlement after 1 July 2014. Thousands today remain trapped by this policy, unable to return to their home country and barred from Australia. In December 2014, Morrison scrapped permanent protection visas in favour of Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEVs). Among the many other cruelties, in 2015 Dutton ended the policy of transferring pregnant women to Australia to give birth. Malcolm Turnbull succeeded Abbott as Prime Minister in September 2015. On 29 April 2016, Omid Masoumali died in Brisbane after self-immolating on Nauru. Turnbull faced the cameras and told us not to get misty eyed.

Throughout this period, refugees resisted. Hunger strikes were common. Many detainees sewed their lips shut – 10 on Christmas Island in 2010, four on Manus in 2014, two more on Nauru in 2021. Unrest on Manus was constant, especially after Reza Barati was beaten to death in February 2014. In January 2015, more than 900 men there went on hunger strike for half the month until guards in full riot gear stormed the compounds. When authorities declared the camp would shut, leaving the men with nothing, 450 of them started what became known as the Siege of Manus. For three weeks in November 2017 the men held out until police beat the remaining men with metal bars. The solidarity movement in Australia mounted waves of rallies. The year before, the movement had won a great victory when doctors at a Brisbane hospital refused to discharge baby Asha back into detention. Constant rallies outside the hospital, with substantial union backing, forced the government to let Asha and her family stay.



## PROTEST ON NAURU - 2015



Photos by refugees on Nauru

## CHILDREN ON NAURU - 2018



Photo (top) by ABC News / Kristian Silva

Photo (bottom) by David Gray/Reuters

**# LET THEM STAY**





Photos by refugees on Manus

## 2017 - MANUS SIEGE



# RESISTING MORRISON 2019-2022



Scott Morrison was the Liberal Prime Minister who created a plaque for himself of a boat with the message engraved, “I stopped these”. Morrison’s cruelty to refugees knew no bounds. But despite this almost boundless cruelty, the movement was able to win small and significant victories against Morrison.

In late 2018, the mental health crisis in Nauru escalated to new heights. Of the hundreds of children detained, many were suffering from “resignation syndrome” - consumed by despair and refusing to eat food or drink. The refugee movement in Australia responded by demanding **Kids Off All Off, Bring Them Here**. Teachers walked out of schools to join rallies. Even Liberal MPs broke ranks to join calls to evacuate children. Under pressure, Morrison relented and all children were evacuated to Australia.

In 2019, many adults in offshore detention continued to suffer serious health issues from years of detention. Solidarity actions by the refugee movement in Australia created the conditions for the Medevac Legislation to be passed in Parliament, against vehement opposition from the Morrison Government. The Medevac Bill allowed critically sick refugees and people seeking asylum held in offshore detention a pathway to be transferred to Australia for urgent medical treatment, on the advice of two doctors.

It marked the first time in 90 years that an Australian sitting government had lost a vote on its own legislation. Hundreds of refugees were evacuated to Australia, before the law was repealed.

In Australia, instead of receiving medical care, refugees were locked up in Alternative Places of Detention (APODS) such as Mantra Hotel and later Park Hotel - prisons by another name. The struggle was to continue.

# PROTESTING AGAINST HOTEL DETENTION DURING COVID

During the COVID-19 pandemic, refugees and their supporters continued protesting for freedom for the refugees locked up in APODS - prisons by another name and hotspots for COVID-19.

On 10 March 2020, Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews warned Victorians to expect "extreme measures" in the wake of the federal government updating travel advice. These included cancelling major sporting events, requiring entire economic sectors to work from home etc.

A state of emergency was declared on 16 March, which was extended on 12 April, with existing directions remaining in place including staying at home, restrictions on particular activities, and detention etc.

On the 10 April, Good Friday, Chris Breen a leading activist of Refugee Action Collective (RAC) was arrested at his home by Victoria Police on a charge of "Incitement" under the 1958 Crimes Act.

RAC had organised support for the Medevac Refugees held (illegally) at the Mantra Hotel, Bell Street Preston by having a Safe cavalcade of activists driving around the hotel to show support and care to the refugees. The cavalcade was safe as unless the activists lived together they were in isolation in their vehicles. In addition to Chris' charge, over twenty activists received fines totaling up to \$50,000 for participating in the covid safe action.

On 29 September, 2020 Chris Breen attended the Magistrates Court, William Street Melbourne and had all the charges dropped. The charges and fines others received were also dropped. This victory followed a public campaign by RAC to defend the right to protest, which included rallies outside the courts.



## DEFEND THE RIGHT TO PROTEST - FREE THE REFUGEES



Photos by Matt Hrkac. Website: <https://matthrkac.com.au/>  
Instagram: matt.hrkac

# SHUT DOWN PARK HOTEL PRISON

In late 2020, in a highly militarised operation, Scott Morrison moved the refugees previously detained in the Mantra to the Park Hotel (dubbed 'Park Hotel Prison' by activists) in Carlton, near the centre of Melbourne CBD. The men indefinitely detained inside were easily visible to passersby outside. Their resistance to the cruel conditions they were subjected to inside thus more readily found a much larger audience of supporters.

Refugee supporters assembled almost every day outside Park Hotel. Regular large scale protests were organised calling for their release, mobilising hundreds, including unionists and community supporters. Many new activists joined the movement.

Novak Djokovic having his Visa rejected and being held in the Park Hotel brought international attention to the Australian government's treatment of people seeking asylum. Creative actions by activists sought to capitalise on this situation.

In the wake of almost constant protests, media reporting and protracted legal action, victory came in the form of a High Court ruling. It found that the infinite detention of refugees was unlawful. Hundreds of refugees were released into the community, practically overnight.

Countless activists scrambled to find accommodation, food and support for the freed refugees, who, while released, continued to live in visa limbo without permanent protection, barred from working, receiving welfare support or accessing the appropriate medical care. The release came as a massive blow to the Morrison Government and contributed to its defeat in 2022.



Photo by Jamal Mohammed



Photo by Matt Hrkac. Website: <https://matthrkac.com.au/>  
Instagram: @matt.hrkac

# MY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH THE REFUGEE ACTION COLLECTIVE OUTSIDE THE PARK HOTEL IN 2021.

“Protests had been called during the lockdown, because refugees were trapped in the Park Hotel, many of whom were brought to Australia from offshore processing in Papua New Guinea and Nauru under the medevac laws for serious health issues that could not be addressed offshore. They were basically shipped from one prison to another and forced to endure terrible conditions. There was no fresh air, they were at times being served mouldy and maggot infested food, and there were complaints of a severe lack of hygiene in general in the hotel, which was bad enough in regular times, but horrific during a pandemic.

At one point Covid19 broke out in the hotel and spread like wildfire as there was little to no ventilation. A Guardian article from the time reported that twenty of the forty-six men in the hotel caught Covid and one got taken to hospital by an ambulance. The article quoted a refugee who said “We have been here nine years and we are dying. We are very, very scared.” Every day there is another case. There is no safety and no rules. Here it is very bad. It is closed, there is no fresh air, it is a small place. There is not any doctor.”

I was so horrified seeing this on the news and had heard that protests were taking place in front of the hotel every day. I had moved from England where I had been active around Refugee rights, including protesting at the border at Calais in France where refugees attempting to go to Britain were kept in cruel conditions in makeshift camps. It was clear to me that was happening then and at the Park Hotel was pure racist scapegoating. There is never a need to treat refugees like criminals and lock them up in such cruel conditions, and lots of other people could see that too. It was fantastic going to the protests and seeing so many people come out and support despite lockdown restrictions that were attempting to stop protests-even though people were showing protests could go ahead without the risk of spreading Covid by distancing and wearing masks.

I'm so glad I decided to go to these protest and be part of an inspiring movement of anti-racists that not only were able to show support to the refugees living in these difficult conditions, but also build up enough pressure so that the government were forced to release all of them and put them on bridging visas.

Obviously permanent visas would have been much more of a victory, as living in limbo is another version of cruelty, but the refugees being released after years of being detained and under a Morrison/ right wing government, shows the power of protest and why it's so important that we build the movement against racist policies from below. This is why I'm a member of RAC and still to this day continue to campaign for Refugee rights. Racist policies are only there to scapegoat and divide and weaken us all, the work RAC does in building a broader movement against this is really important not just for Refugees, but for a better world for everyone." - **Jasmine Francis, RAC Vic Member**



# REFUGEES DETAINED IN MELBOURNE'S MANTRA HOTEL SPEAK OUT: "OUR LOCKDOWN IS INDEFINITE"

Interview with Mostafa  
Azimitabar & Ramsiyar  
Sabanayagam



PUBLISHED IN

**JACOBIN**

# RESISTING ALBANESE 2022-TODAY

Anthony Albanese swept into office in 2022 on the back of considerable pro-refugee sentiment. In addition to the protests outside of hotel detention, the outgoing Coalition Government faced widespread public opposition to its treatment of the Tamil refugee family - Priya Nadesalingam and her husband, Nades Murugappan and their two children - who it had ripped out of their tight-knit community in Biloela, Central Qld in a pre-dawn raid and dumped on Christmas Island, with plans to deport them to danger in Sri Lanka.

During the election campaign, Albanese declared that under his Government “no-one (would be) held back, no-one (would be) left behind”. He vowed to grant the Biloela family permanent protection and to give almost 19,000 refugees on Temporary Protection Visas and SHEVs a pathway to permanency. Whilst RAC welcomed these changes, Labor continued many of the most egregious cruelties of its predecessors, leaving behind tens of thousands of others.

On day one of Albanese’s first term in Government, Border Force turned back a boat carrying refugees. And although Labor abolished the Fast Track System established by Tony Abbott in 2013, they did not give justice to the 8500 or so victims - many of whom had been living in the community for over 12 years on insecure visas. The powerful encampments by refugees publicly exposed this contradiction.

The encampments made **permanent visas for all** a central demand for the movement during Albanese’s first term. At the same time, 14,000 refugees still languish on Indonesia, dozens on PNG and Labor has reopened Nauru as a destination for deportations.

Recently Labor introduced new laws expanding offshore detention and making it easier to deport refugees and migrants. The fight continues.

# BIG WALKS

The **Big Walk 4 Refugees** was inspired by the incredible refugee-led actions of 2023 when refugees and people seeking asylum walked and cycled thousands of kilometres to Sydney and Canberra to share their experiences with Australians.

They battled rain, cold and heat, with blisters on top of blisters. They dealt with being apart from their families, injuries, and snakes. They walked on behalf of more than 10,000 others who, like themselves, have been living in Australia and are part of our community. But they remain in limbo because they do not have permanent visas. This means they have been unable to rebuild their lives, to ensure a future for their children and to reunite with family overseas.

The Big Walk 4 Refugees in 2024 was a solidarity action to show support for these children, women and men to be able to call Australia home. The 2024 virtual walk traced a lap around Australia, starting in Tasmania and finishing 6 weeks later doing virtual laps of Parliament House, Canberra.

A virtual walk gave hundreds of people from all over Australia the opportunity to dedicate their steps to show support for refugee justice and a call to change Australia's harmful policies on seeking asylum.

The Big Walk returned in 2025, continuing the call for change. People stepped out in towns large and small in all states and territories. Children, students, parents on their way to school, grandparents in aged care facilities and more all dedicated their steps to the call for real and lasting change in Australia's policies towards refugees and people seeking asylum.



**Download the Big Walk 4 Refugees 2025 Report**  
<https://www.bigwalk4refugees.au/2025report>

# ENCAMPMENTS

In 2024, Refugees started organising for their rights to permanent visas and a safe future. Many have been living in the community for over 12 years.

They demanded permanent visas for over 10,000 refugees, currently living in Australia on bridging visas which have to be renewed periodically, usually every six months.

Refugees and asylum seekers set up around-the-clock encampments in Naarm/Melbourne, Gadigal Country/Sydney, Kurna Yerta/Adelaide and Boorloo/Perth, calling for permanent protection, an end to deportations and the ability for families to reunite.

This became a powerful movement entirely self-organised by refugees drawing in many volunteers who were brought together every day to cook meals, organise overnight support, banner paintings, meetings and weekly rallies to keep the protest going. Many were set up outside local MPs, department of home affairs and immigration offices.

The movement also brought together people from different backgrounds and campaigns including many Tamil people and their children, refugee rights groups, Palestinian activists, trade unionists, activists from the housing justice campaign, socialist parties and the Greens.

Refugees took days off work and made personal sacrifices to ensure the encampment continued.

Some refugees at the encampments were violently attacked by racists. Local councils also forced some of them to take their tents down which meant sleeping on the ground with no shelter in the middle of winter.

Tragically, over the course of the encampment protest, four refugees lost their lives to suicide.

Over forty-eight asylum seekers have died awaiting a residency decision in the 12 years since mandatory offshore detention for asylum seekers arriving by boat was introduced.

The protest movement had political impact, prompting twenty-five crossbench MPs to write to the Prime Minister calling for action on the issue and a few speaking at the rallies.

The encampments also served as a powerful reminder of the unnecessary suffering of the thousands of human victims of Labor's policies, which directly contravene Australia's obligations under the 1951 United Nations refugee convention.

By putting a human face to Labor's cruel policy, refugees across the country were able to challenge Labor's cruel and inhumane approach to some of the most vulnerable people in the world. Some people have been deported, or forced to return to the country they fled, because they couldn't surmount the barriers of living on a restrictive visa.

Temporary protection visa and bridging visa holders have limited access to tertiary education and healthcare, and they are vulnerable to super-exploitation from bosses.

Refugees apply to settle here because they are fleeing war, persecution, climate disasters, economic crises and genocides.

Some have survived the harshness of refugee camps, including in Manus and Nauru.

The refugees and their allies were able to continue the encampment for 100 days. This remarkable achievement was marked with a big rally on October 22nd, 2024.

The fight for permanent visas for the 9,500 refugees will continue in other forms.

RAC will continue to seek justice for refugees and keep building the movement until every refugee impacted by the fast-track process receives a permanent visa.



# DEPORTATION POWERS

Successive Governments have engaged in deportations and deportation attempts of refugees and asylum seekers. At least three ethnic Hazara asylum seekers have been deported to danger in Afghanistan since August 2014. Countless Tamils have been deported to Sri Lanka as a result of “enhanced screening”. A combination of legal action, anti-deportation protests and direct action have managed to halt some deportations in their tracks.

Last year, Albanese passed a series of new, cruel laws, **the Migration Amendment (Removal and Other Measures) Act 2024**. The Government was responding to – and deepening – a racist panic that asylum-seekers who have committed crimes, served their time in prison and have been released into the community are a special threat. Citizens released from prison can return to their homes and families. Asylum-seekers should have that right, too.

These laws not only impose released detainees to wear ankle bracelets, but forces refugees targeted with deportation to participate in their own deportation - or face jail time. It also gives the Government the power to pay poor, third countries like Nauru to take asylum-seekers, making deportation much easier and effectively expanding offshore detention. Under these laws, Australia has signed a \$1.6 billion dollar deal with Nauru to except deportations.

People deported to third countries like Nauru are not guaranteed permanent residency there. They could be detained or sent to their home country where they would face harm.

The Bill also allows the Minister overturn refugee determinations for virtually all refugees and asylum-seekers in Australia.

In 2025, Labor passed another set of laws, dubbed by advocates, ‘The Anti-Fairness Bill’, which permits Border Force to engage in ICE-style raids and removes asylum seekers and migrants’ rights to a fair trial.

These laws are emboldening far right calls for mass deportations of migrants and refugees. They need to be fought and repealed.

# NO DEPORTATIONS



# FREE THE REFUGEES IN INDONESIA



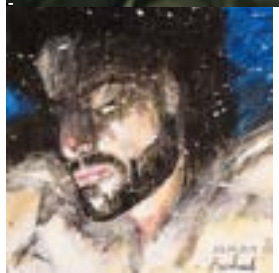
# ART AS RESISTANCE

## MUSIC



**Song title:** 12 Years Too Long (2024)

**Artist:** Rose Turtle-ertler in collaboration with Tamil refugees Naarm/Melbourne who are asking for permanent residency after 12 years of uncertainty.



**Song title:** The Big Exhale (2019)

**Artist:** Farhad Bandesh

**Download:** [farhadbandeshband.bandcamp.com/](http://farhadbandeshband.bandcamp.com/)



**Song title:** All the Same (2017)

**Artist:** Moz

**Download:** <https://chuffed.org/fundraiser/1873>

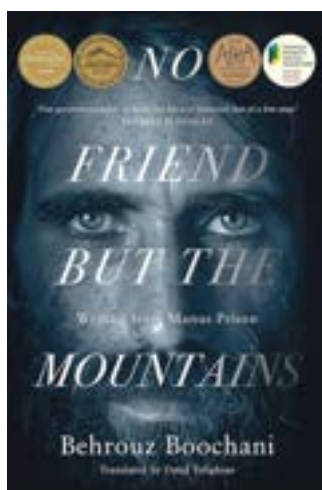


**Song title:** Flee from War (Our Rights) (2018)

**Artist:** Farhad Bandesh Band



## WRITING

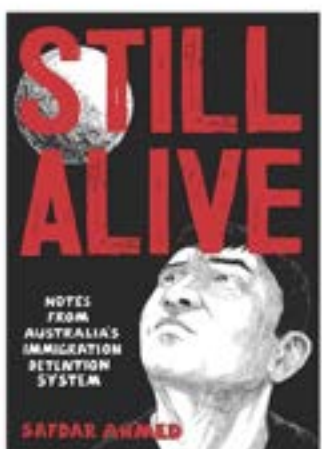
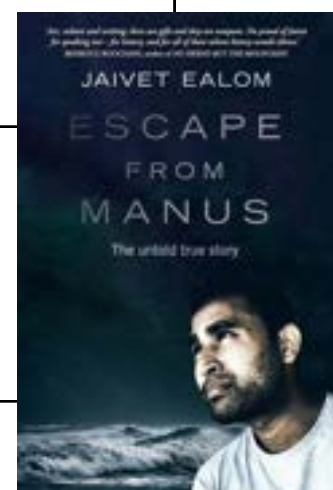


**Book title:** No friend but the mountains

**Author:** Behrouz Boochani

**Book title:** Escape from Manus

**Author:** Jaivet Ealom

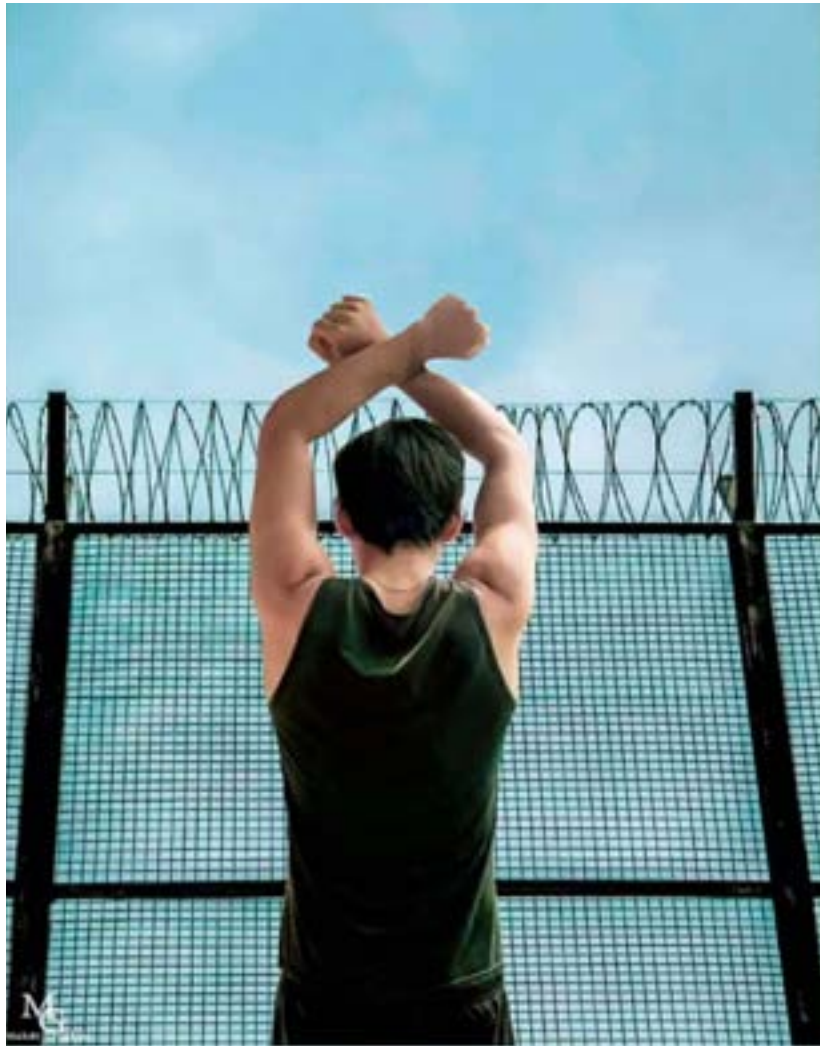


**Book title:** Still Alive: Notes from Australia's Immigration Detention System,

**Author:** Safdar Ahmed

# VISUAL ART

By Mahdi, a refugee  
Print purchasable at Asylum Art Project



By Judy Kuo, activist and artist in  
Naarm. [judykuo.bigcartel.com](http://judykuo.bigcartel.com)

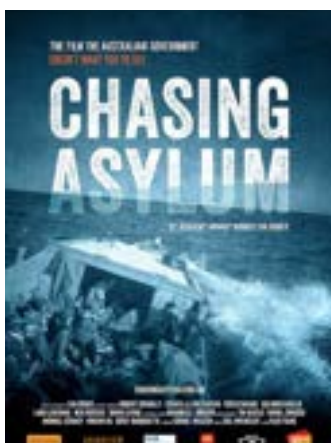


# FILM



**Title:** Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time (2017)  
**Director:** Arash Kamali Sarvestani & Behrouz Boochani

**Title:** I was actually there (2024)  
**Episode:** Woomera Detention Centre Breakout  
Produced by the ABC



**Title:** Chasing Asylum (2016)  
**Director:** Eva Orner

**Title:** FLEE (2021)  
**Director:** Jonas Poher Rasmussen



# THERE IS AN ALTERNATIVE

Mandatory detention of “unauthorised” asylum seekers didn’t exist in Australia until 1992. Under Malcom Fraser’s government, the first small numbers of Vietnamese boat arrivals to Australia didn’t experience detention, but were referred to charities for assistance while their claims were assessed in the community.

Later boat arrivals were housed in migrant hotels. As the National Museum of Australia documents, the first refugee boat ever to arrive in Australia reached Darwin in 1976 carrying just five young men. Lam Binh, his 17-year-old brother and three friends had navigated the 2600 kilometres all the way from Vietnam in a fishing boat, finding their way from Timor with only a page torn from a school atlas.

However an increase in boat arrivals in 77-78 gave way to the now all too familiar Government fearmongering. The Fraser government turned to scapegoating and set up regional processing deals with Malaysia and Thailand to stop more boats arriving. Years on, Australia has established a fortress of border controls and deterrence measures, including offshore detention and a suite of new Trump-like powers. But the history shows such detention and deterrence is neither humane nor necessary.

The cost of running offshore detention is in billions. Nauru will cost \$2.5 billion over 30 years on top of an initial payment of \$408 million - money that could be spent to resettle refugees in Australia, fund community services and programs for refugees. The cost to refugees lives has been far greater.

But the fearmongering about refugees coming by boat was never warranted. At the highpoint of the refugee crisis in 2013, a maximum of 20,587 refugees arrived to Australia by boat. Meanwhile, other countries currently host millions: Turkey, 3.6 million; Iran, 3.4 million; Colombia, 2.5 million, Germany, 2.1 million; and Pakistan, 1.7 million. A rich country like Australia has no excuse for not welcoming refugees all refugees that seek our protection here. But such policy change can only be achieved by continuing the resistance - of refugee supporters and crucially by refugees themselves.



Photo by National Museum of Australia, <https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/vietnamese-refugees-boat-arrival>



Photo by Australian Refugee Advocacy Network (ARAN)

# WHAT DID YOU THINK ABOUT THIS EXHIBITION?

RAC welcomes comments and feedback on this exhibition. Please submit your thoughts or comments via the QR Code below. We are particularly interested in the thoughts of people with lived experiences of forcible displacement or anyone involved in pro-refugee campaigning.

Alternatively you can contact us on [refugeeactioncollective@gmail.com](mailto:refugeeactioncollective@gmail.com).



# SUPPORT MATT HRKAC, PHOTOGRAPHER

Many of the photos in this exhibition were taken by Matt Hrkac, an award-winning provider of photography, videography and media services in Melbourne and the surrounding areas. In solidarity with the refugee campaign, Matt has generously allowed RAC to show these images for free.

Please consider supporting Matt's work by purchasing a copy of his collection, **2024: A YEAR OF PROTESTS IN PHOTOS**.



Website: [matthrkac.com.au](http://matthrkac.com.au) | Instagram: [Matt.Hrkac](https://www.instagram.com/Matt.Hrkac)

# GET INVOLVED IN RAC

RAC is a democratic grassroots collective representing a broad cross-section of the community and are member of Refugee Action Network (RAN), a network of advocacy groups in Victoria.

We stand for the humane and dignified treatment of asylum-seekers and refugees in accordance with Australia's international and humanitarian obligation. This includes, however, is not limited to the following:

- Allowing people who arrive by boat seeking asylum in Australia to live and work in the community while their claims are being processed rather than being forcibly detained in Australia or sent overseas to Papa New Guinea, Nauru or other countries.
- Providing permanent protection and not discriminating against refugees on the basis of their documentation, means of arrival or ethnicity.
- By providing fair and speedy assessment of asylum claims in Indonesia and Malaysia and the guaranteed timely settlement in Australia of those determined to be refugees.
- Advocating for a generous approach to accepting refugees based on the wealth of our country which welcomes refugees for their positive contribution to the betterment of Australia's economy, culture and society.

If you want to find out more about RAC, visit our website ([rac-vic.org](http://rac-vic.org)) or call David on 0438 547 723. As we are an entirely volunteer run organisation, we rely on donations by supporters to put on events like these. Please consider donating to RAC via BSB: 033 062, Account 633 488 or the QR Code below.

**DONATE TO RAC**



**JOIN OUR NEXT ORGANISING MEETING**

**MONDAYS, 6:30PM  
KATHLEEN SYME LIB  
CARLTON OR ZOOM**

**ALL WELCOME!**



Website: [www.rac-vic.org](http://www.rac-vic.org) | Instagram: [rac\\_victoria](https://www.instagram.com/rac_victoria) | Facebook: [racvic](https://www.facebook.com/racvic)