

# Call for a Constitution



This poem was provoked by conversations that have been going on around me for the past 20 years that address a question: what kind of country do you wish to live in?

As we have no written constitution, which is to say, no form of words that define a contract between a people and a government, certain values are easily over-ridden.

I don't like this.

I believe that we should be able to say when an action is 'constitutional' or not.

The poem defines what those values might be, and I wrote it to place a form of words in the landscape, to put down a marker that I hope can help to define a consensus in an area that is vague. For this reason the poem is as simple as possible and the words are there to be counted on one hand, as one might teach them in a primary school.

They arise from years of engagement with people through various kinds of art, and they present themselves like a manifesto for my poetry project, *The Book of Days*. And this is at a time when various people around the world – in Libya, Tunisia and Egypt, for example – urgently need to define their own constitutions.

I have been invited to display it in the members area of the Scottish Parliament from the 17<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> September 2012, with a lecture to MSPs on the 25<sup>th</sup> September at 6pm.

This is a very exciting opportunity.

The poem is not just there for MSPs, but for everyone, and I feel this act only makes sense if the presence of everyone is behind its appearance at Holyrood. So—

- I wish to invite as many places as possible – galleries, libraries, theatres, village halls – to display the poem at the same time that it is present in the parliament, and to link the events together.
- I wish MSPs to know, to their delight or discomfort, that as they read the poem it is being read across the country by many other people *at the same time*.
- And I wish the people outside the parliament, as they read it and leave a mark, a comment or a handprint, to know that that gesture is making an impact in the parliament *at the same time*.

The poem works well when the installation is made on a scale this is proportion to the human body: it invites a certain respect - a stillness, a contemplation - and it also invites people to participate. The act of participation is very significant, and a good way to achieve that is to encourage people to leave a handprint. I shall do this in the parliament, and I hope it is done wherever the poem is on display.



It will work on any wall: it works well on a corner, pointing outwards or inwards, outdoors or indoors. Because the layout has a split down the middle, I can also imagine it working well on a double doorway, for people to push through, and also as a miniature, a small multiple, and so on. The installation of the poem can adapt itself to anywhere that has the curiosity to host it.

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It is important that the poem is presented in at least two languages, English and Gaelic, but I also want to invite translations into as many languages as possible – Lallans and Arabic would be good, for example – and to display all these versions both in the parliament and on the internet. I intend to be present in the parliament for the time that it is there.

I want to make it possible, through photographs, movies and a live blog that everywhere the poem is being read is represented as part of the display. A photograph simply needs to show people taking it seriously, as is intended.

Wherever the poem is invited, in the month before the display I will travel to make the installation of the vinyl text, and give a performance, the details of which can be found on my website: [www.angusreid.co.uk](http://www.angusreid.co.uk)

I hope to place it on at least 20 walls, from Biggar to Unst, from Galloway to Kirkwall.

I wish to hear from you: contact me about this project via [info@angusreid.co.uk](mailto:info@angusreid.co.uk)



if I as a writer of poetry  
were called upon to give a form of words  
to model the nation's behaviour  
it would be this

ownership obliges everyone to respect and to care for  
*the sacred*  
to respect and to care for  
*freedom of conscience*  
and to recognise  
*the gift of every individual*  
to respect it  
care for it nourish it  
to care for and protect *communities*  
and  
to care for *the land*  
and wherever  
the land has been abused to restore it  
so that it can support all forms of life  
  
five principles five fingers on the hand