

Drama for Life Zimbabwe Project

1. Introduction

Drama for Life Zimbabwe Project (DFLZP) is a Human Rights Theatre Initiative that operates within the Framework of **Drama for Life**.

DFLZP is a concept that seeks to contribute to the normalization of the Zimbabwean human rights, social and political situation and to promote democracy. The project targets Zimbabweans living in Diaspora, those living in Zimbabwe and has got some universal messages for SADC countries and the international community. DFLZP views the need for this as an ongoing process that is nonpartisan but human rights focused.

DFLZP seeks to achieve its aims and objectives through workshops, performances, public debate and discourse and research and documentation.

2. Aims

1. To promote a sound human rights climate in the ongoing political turmoil in Zimbabwe.
2. To promote minority and silenced groups like gay people, minority ethnic groups and races rights in Zimbabwe.
3. To engage Zimbabweans living outside the country on issues of human rights and minority rights in particular.
4. To use workshops and performances to build a Zimbabwean community that appreciates and tolerates differences.
5. To create dialogue around matters of human rights.

3. Motivation

The Zimbabwean situation has gone from bad to worse with each year due to a political struggle that has compromised human rights to alarming rates. Zimbabweans have been denied even the most basic human needs because of the political situation. Different groups have been targeted and some have been manipulated to take part in oppressing others. Diversity has been manipulated by politicians to serve their own selfish interest while dividing the nation and promoting discrimination. All social groups have borne the brunt of this discrimination, torture and oppression one way or the other. The story of Zimbabwe is that of a nation of people of different colors, interests and orientations that have never been allowed to be fully themselves. A strong and brave human rights watchdog is critical in this situation and DFLZP seeks to achieve this by using theatre and the safe space that it provides in dealing with these challenges.

4. Specific Projects.

Speak Truth to Power is a Project of the Robert Kennedy Centre for Justice and Human Rights in partnership with Drama for Life.

1. Speak Truth to Power

Speak Truth to Power, a project of the Robert Kennedy Centre for Justice and Human Rights, is a multi-faceted global initiative that uses experiences of fifty-one courageous human rights defenders around the world who have committed their lives to issues ranging from demilitarization to children of war, from environmental activism to religious self-determination, to educate students and the public at large and urge them to take action.

Speak Truth to Power began as a book written by Kerry Kennedy and has been adapted into a dramatic production by noted playwright Ariel Dorfman, and performed in eleven countries, most recently in Romania. It also features an exhibit of human rights defenders' portraits by the late Pulitzer Prize winning photographer Eddie Adams. Moreover, it includes an acclaimed human rights education curriculum that has been distributed to schools in the U.S, Europe and Africa.

We tell their stories, in the belief that each one of us has the capacity to change a small portion of events and that these stories provide important lessons about the power of ordinary citizens to shape a more just and peaceful world.

In summary, Kerry Kennedy spent several years interviewing human rights defenders around the world about the quality of courage for Speak Truth to Power and listened as they spoke of issues of human rights in over forty countries, spanning six continents, with topics as far ranging as political rights, free expression, honor killings, demilitarization, environmental activism, mental health, children's rights, and national self-determination to name just a few. The individuals portrayed include human rights defenders Vaclav Havel of the Czech Republic and Baltasar Garzon of Spain, as well as Nobel Prize laureates His Holiness, The Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Elie Wiesel, Oscar Arias, Rigoberta Menchu and Kailash Satyarthi of India.

Speak Truth to Power encourages governments, NGOs, major foundations and individuals to support human rights, and brings much-needed attention to continuing abuses. But perhaps its most lasting effect will be to demonstrate the capacity of the individual to create change. The play is directed by Bhekilizwe Bernard Ndlovu

2. The Trial of the Senior Citizen

It is a play written by Bhekilizwe Bernard Ndlovu based on real life stories collected from Zimbabweans on the issue of the silencing and oppression of gay people in Zimbabwe. The play employs a jury trial format where a much respected member of the country is tried on his own behalf as well as on behalf of his countryman who are homophobic and

discriminatory. The play shows discrimination coming from the same source as racism, tribalism and any other forms of discrimination. At the end of the play the audience passes the verdict. The Play is directed by Bhekilizwe Bernard Ndlovu.

3. Woza Joshua

This is an adaptation of the popular South African apartheid satire, *Woza Albert* by Mbongeni Ngema, Percy Mtwa and Barney Simon. *Woza Joshua* reflects the shocking levels the Zimbabwean situation has degenerated into with school going children working as vendors in the street and old women and men begging in the streets as politicians continue with speeches, arrests and threats. It shows how political solutions only fail to address the challenges of the ordinary citizenry. That an apartheid play can be adapted to speak to the Zimbabwean situation shows that oppression is one thing regardless of different colors. The script is adapted by Bhekilizwe Bernard Ndlovu, directed by Warren Nebe and choreographed by Clayton Ndlovu.

4. The tales of Cont Mhlanga

This is a one man theatre piece that employs the technique of story telling to explore the journey of a theatre guru who is arguably the father of Zimbabwean theatre as we know it today. It started as an article written by Cont himself as part of his recollections of his exploits and impediments as a theatre practitioner under the Robert Mugabe regime. Cont's story epitomizes many stories that have not been told by those who tried to carve their niche in the field of theatre during this most difficult time and gives hope to those who wish to embark on their own journeys in the challenging yet satisfying field of theatre.

CONT MHLANGA

Cont Mhlanga has had an illustrious career in the arts industry and his notable achievement has been the founding of Amakhosi Productions in 1980 and subsequently founded and spearheaded the building of a multi purpose arts complex, Amakhosi Township Square Cultural Center in Bulawayo which was the first of its kind in Zimbabwe in 1995. He also founded www.amakhosi.org and www.voicesfromzimbabwe.com.

Cont Mhlanga has written 21 plays and published 3 books and has produced several TV programs. He has directed and produced over 15 productions by other writers. He founded Amakhosi Performing Arts Academy that provides formal arts training in 1987 and the arts training academy has provided graduates in the fields of music, theatre, drama, television and film in the country.

His works have been produced in various countries and some of it has toured extensively internationally. Mhlanga developed a theater for development concept

called Theatre for Community Action, which is being increasingly used across Africa as a community research and community participatory tool in order to foster social development.

Mhlanga has performed in stage and film productions. He created a television soap Amakorokoza and a radio soap NgokwakoSigadula. He also founded Inxusa Festival in 1990 and with Sam Mkhithika and the late Maxwell Mhlanga founded Intwasa Festival Ko Bulawayo.

He has participated in several joint projects of top of the shelf productions with various international partners. He founded MCM Foundation Trust to manage all his copyright intellectual property licensing and royalties. He is an arts trainer and arts consultant of note who has traveled to all the five continents to run workshops, seminars design and manage arts and culture projects for both community institutions, groups, NGO's academic institutions including colleges and universities under his training brand The Cont Institute.

Cont Mhlanga is the holder of several awards both in Zimbabwe and Internationally including Civic Honors from the City of Bulawayo his home town and a Rotary Citation in recognition of his contribution to arts and culture. He is largely self taught in the fields of arts as he graduated in agriculture and not the arts. His projects and clients are too numerous to count in a carrier that has been brilliantly guided by his ancestors and God for the past 27years.

Referee

Justice Edwin Cameron