# 17th Drama for Life Conference and Festival, 2025

**Conference and Festival Title: Human change! from global ideals to justice(us)?**

Themes: Human Change, Justice, Global ideals, and Just~~ice~~(Us)

Dates: 8 to 10 October 2025

Location: University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

Hosted by: Drama for Life, University of the Witwatersrand

## Conference Overview

“In these times of calamity, when moral values are bought and sold on the globalised market … To dream of a better world is not utopia – it is the first act of resistance.” Augusto Boal

In a world where global ideals often fail to translate into local realities, the arts have the potential to bridge the gap through critical imagination, collective memory, resistance, and healing.

Drama for Life is rooted in the lived experiences and epistemologies of the “Global village”, this year’s gathering foregrounds justice not as a distant, universalist ideal—but as a co-created, embodied, and locally-rooted practice of “Just~~ice~~(Us).”

The 17th Drama for Life Conference and Festival takes place at a time of profound political instability, social dislocation, crisis driven migration, territorial exclusivity, climate emergency, misappropriation of the rule of law, and escalating human and technological authoritarianism across the globe. In response to these upheavals, the conference asks how the applied arts and arts therapies—not just for solace, but for radical reimagination.

The conference asks:
What does it mean to be human now, what is human change now, what inspires change—and how must we change in relation to global ideals?

We explore how Applied Drama and Theatre, Expressive Arts Therapies, Movement, Dance, and other embodied and arts-based practices can act as powerful tools for shaping systems, healing trauma, challenging injustice, and envisioning change.

As the world faces rising inequality, dehumanisation, climate catastrophe, and moral collapse, the arts remind us that change begins in the body, the breath, the story, the rhythm.

This is a space to reflect, resist, reimagine, and steer a praxis toward locally rooted, but globally conscious ideals. To centre Just~~ice~~(Us)! To reclaim our collective capacity for human change and justice.

We invite you to join this urgent conference—in movement, in dialogue, in resistance, in hope.

## Conference Aims

• To explore the role of Applied Drama and Theatre, Arts Therapies, Dance and Movement Arts, and other applied arts in engaging and addressing human change: Personal, social, political, and systemic.

• To reimagine justice as an embodied, relational, and co-created practice—Just~~ice~~(Us).

• To interrogate the gap between global ideals (justice, equity, transformation) and local lived realities using arts-based, therapeutic, and performance methods.

• To provide a critical, creative space for artists, teachers, scholars, practitioners, students, and activists to reflect on how, when, and why human change should occur in times of socio-political disruption.

• To offer a festival-conference experience that responds to trauma, inequality, and authoritarianism with resilience, renewal, and radical hope through the arts.

• To ground arts-for-social-transformation practices in the realities of the 21st-century zeitgeist—including the climate crisis, Fourth Industrial Revolution (including AI), systemic injustice, and global disconnection.

## Guiding Questions

• What does “human change” look and feel like in communities navigating systemic violence, trauma, and repression?

• How do performance and therapeutic arts contribute to justice, healing, and collective care in times of crisis?

• What does it mean to shift from Global Ideals to Just~~ice~~(Us) and vice versa?

• How can we decentre Eurocentric paradigms of justice and uplift indigenous, embodied, and community-rooted knowledge systems?

• What are the ethical responsibilities of artists, therapists, and facilitators working in oppressive or authoritarian contexts?

• How do performance and the expressive arts hold space for grief, rage, hope, and imagination in fractured societies?

• What perspectives, disciplines, or histories are missing in current discourses of human change—and how can the arts surface them?

• What lessons from historical revolutions, cultural shifts, and spiritual traditions can we draw on to navigate our current era?

• How do we measure or evaluate meaningful human change in arts-based practice?

• Are the arts therapies, in particular,—for us or for justice? How do we build a future where both are true?

**Key Focus Areas**

• Arts-based responses to political trauma, repression, and authoritarianism

• Decolonial, indigenous, and various approaches to change

• Human futures: rethinking humanity in this Industrial Revolution (Think of AI)

• Applied Arts in mental health, education, migration, and displacement

• Collaborative praxis and community-anchored interventions

• From advocacy to action: performance for change

## Who Should Apply

• Applied drama and theatre practitioners and teachers

• Arts therapists and creative arts professionals

• Community arts facilitators

• Activists and human rights workers

• Scholars and researchers

• Students and early-career practitioners

• Interdisciplinary teams and collectives

**IMPORTANT NOTE:**

We are also pleased to share that some of the presentations from this conference may be considered for inclusion in an upcoming special edition of the South African Theatre Journal.

## Submission Guidelines

• Title of your presentation/workshop/performance

• Type of submission (paper, performance, workshop, panel, exhibition etc.)

• Abstract (300–500 words) describing your proposal and its relevance to the theme

• Short biography (max 150 words)

• Technical requirements (if applicable)