

REVEREND ERIK KUMEDISA

Recipient of the International Award for Promoting Gandhian Values Outside India - 2024

Born: February 2, 1954

The Beginning: Erik Kumedisa was born in Kinzamba, a village in the Kwilu province, Gungu territory, Democratic Republic of Congo. He is an academician by training, holding a Diploma of Advanced Studies in Protestant Theology (DEA), with specialization in phenomenology of religions since 1989. He has also obtained several patents and certificates of specialization in peace sciences and peaceful resolution conflicts: museology, archives and history of the Church.

Since 1986; he served as pastor of the Church of Christ in Congo. In recent years, without resigning from this position, Erik Kumedisa devotes majority of his time to the administration of the Gandhi Monks Community, a non-profit association that he founded in 2008. He is on a mission to change and transform a situation of unjust for the betterment of the people in Congo region.

Discovering Gandhi: His Anabaptist research led him to discover Bapu, Mahatma Gandhi. Erik Kumedisa was very impressed by his concept of Non-violence and the theology that follows from it. Previously, Erik Kumedisa had vaguely heard of Mahatma Gandhi, but in a very suspicious spirit. And yet, reading his books and those of his Western disciple, Lanza del Vasto; he discovered a very fascinating man who, through the ancestry of his conscience and his heart, fought against the British Indian Empire through the only peaceful method of Satyagraha, Non-Violence. Mahatma Gandhi's exploits in South Africa, the creation of ashrams (a sort of oases of peace) wherever he went, as well as the Salt March put on Erik Kumedisa the burden of perpetuating this ideal and sharing it among the fellow citizens of Congo. He feels that through his way of living and acting, Gandhi truly tried with all his might to live. Erik Kumedisa is on a mission to change and transform a situation of unjust for the betterment of the region.

Gandhi Monks: The impact of the discovery of Mahatma Gandhi had moved Erik Kumedisa. He decided and established, in February 2008, a non-profit association called Gandhi Monks. The word "Monks" does not offer a technical meaning viz. isolation from the world, celibacy, etc. Gandhi Monks are men and women who are living isolated or grouped, united among themselves by the ideal of Non-violence, without being isolated from the world. They are committed to breaking with certain practices that generate violence. By studying the Gandhian philosophy, Erik Kumedisa understood one thing: a work of hands carried out with conviction is an essential element of a fulfilling and happy life for oneself. Since he discovered this essential truth; Erik Kumedisa spends majority of his time working in the fields with other Gandhi Monks, in agriculture, poultry and small livestock farming.

Being a Gandhi Monk is an attitude and a way of life adopted, not by constraint but by personal deliberation; a way of life based on moral and spiritual convictions of Non-violence as Mahatma Gandhi experienced it. The Gandhi Monks are a Cooperative Association of those who adhere to the ideal of Gandhi and who want to live their life according to the principles of Non-violence. The institution's role is also to design and

produce teaching materials for education and to outline methods that help to promote traditional crafts and ancestral science.

Achievement: Since the creation of the Gandhi Monks Association to this day; Erik Kumedisa continues to explore various activities with visible impact. It comprises of the following:

- Publishing and free distribution of leaflets that make Gandhi and his message known.
- Community FM radio broadcasting to air and propagate the message of Non-violence.
- Watching CinéGandhiVie, films and videos as a recreational activity for the leisure and to help imbibe the culture of Non-violence in the service of youth.
- Organising training courses for apprenticeships in trades as an introduction to the economy of self-sufficiency, Swadeshi.
- Conducting workshops/sessions/lectures at Gandhi Science and Peace Institute (IGSP) in Kikwit, for students who enrol in programmes like rural economy, peace education and inter-religious theology.
- Regularly participating and speaking, as a teacher, in conferences at the country level and abroad.
- Being the official cultural consultant at the Embassy of India in Kinshasa for world days of Yoga and Gandhi.
- Organizing days of reflection and conference-debates within the universities which invite Erik Kumedisa and the Gandhi Monks

In 1993, Erik Kumedisa was awarded as a Bridge Teacher between the Banyarwanda and the indigenous tribes of Hunde and Nyanga, in Goma, in the east of the country. In 1998, the Network of Organizations Committed to Civic Education awarded him the prize of merit for having developed educational sheets for the use of democratic culture. And in 2003, in Bulawayo (Zimbabwe), Erik Kumedisa was presented the prize for excellence as best writer-editor of the world history of the Mennonites and the Brothers in Christ, French-speaking Africa section.

Erik Kumedisa is pleased to realize that people in Congo are beginning to put into practice the precepts of Non-violence in their business, thus encouraging them to move forward.

Reverend Erik Kumedisa believes that the goal is to create a cultural mindset that is consistent with taking charge of oneself for one's own good and the good of the community according to his resources, means and skills, to remove the spectre of dependence as far as possible.

Highlights:

Where the spirit of revenge is always present in discussions, where talking about Non-violence seems to be a weakness and a defeatism, most people have started accepting Gandhi's message with ease in Congo.

When we master the concept of Swadeshi, we will understand it better that there is an interrelation between different professions in the rural world.

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Awards & Recognitions:

1993: Bridge Teacher Award

1998: Prize of Merit

2003: Excellence Award for Best Writer-Editor

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