

W5 on Missions

Who? **Gato Munyamasoko** is no stranger to the need for peace and reconciliation. In 1959, his parents fled ethnic violence in Rwanda. Gato was later born in exile in Zaire, (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo-DRC). While working as a teacher in the DRC, Gato and other youth leaders brought various factions together to help overcome national rivalries and ethnic differences between Rwandans and Congolese. After the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, Gato and his family moved to Rwanda to help in the reconstruction of the nation. Because he had connections with the Association of Baptist Churches of Rwanda (AEBR), Gato was appointed as a high school principal in a region that bordered the DRC. Despite the difficult circumstances, he encouraged reconciliation groups within the schools. Those responsible for the genocide had fled to the DRC but often made cross-border attacks upon Rwanda; on one occasion, the entire student body of a nearby boarding school was killed. Gato and his wife, Anne-Marie, opened their home to accept genocide orphans as their own children. (ethicsdaily.com, July 24, 2015) Gato later became Director of the AEBR's Education, Youth, and Health department in charge of 47 schools and two vocational training centres which reaches some of the most poor and vulnerable in Rwanda. Gato also served as regional pastor in the Kibungo region and was responsible for a new urban church-planting effort. (cbmin.org) Gato and Anne-Marie have seven children.

When? Gato joined CBM as National Field Staff in 2007.

Where? **Rwanda** is a land locked country in east Africa known as the "Land of a Thousand Hills."

What? When Gato began with CBM, he served as Peace and Reconciliation Specialist within the AEBR, CBM's partner. In this role, he trained and mentored hundreds of youth and young adults to become peacemakers and reconcilers based on an understanding of biblical justice. He also worked to mediate peace between the DRC and Rwanda during times of tension. He expanded his peace building role to Kenya, visiting and working with Kenyan church leaders after the 2007 election violence. He helped Kenyan churches to become agents of peace in preparation for the 2013 Kenyan national elections. In 2010, Gato helped found a peace camp movement, now recognized by the Rwandan government, which brings young women and men together from various provinces in Rwanda. This week long program brings survivors of genocide and those whose parents were imprisoned for acts of genocide together providing the opportunity to become an intentional community of equality, respect, creativity and dialogue. Peace camp participants engage in music, drama, art and poetry that help to bring healing and reconciliation. (bwa.org/news)

When Gato's CBM portfolio grew to include Integral

Gato Munyamasoko with his wife, Anne-Marie, receiving the BWA Human Rights award from David Maddox.



Mission Educator, he initiated a campaign among pastors to combat the growing issue of HIV/AIDS stigmatization within the AEBR churches. As pastors were trained to become role models for caregivers of those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, the stigmatization issue dissipated within AEBR congregations. (bwa.org/news)

Gato currently serves the AEBR as their general secretary, and is a CBM Strategic Associate as he continues to encourage the work of peace building, justice and reconciliation. One of these initiatives is a sport and arts project aimed at helping children and youth express their views on peace. This initiative helps them to engage in organized outreach activities and income generating projects that unite them as they work together toward common goals in their communities. (cbmin.org)

In July, during the 2015 Baptist World Alliance Congress in Durbin, South Africa, Gato was presented with the Baptist World Alliance Congress Human Rights Award. This award given every five years, is in recognition for his work in peace and reconciliation. The citation read during the presentation described Gato as a strong advocate, a prophetic witness, a champion of the vulnerable, a reconciler, peacemaker, pacifist and mediator. BWA General Secretary Neville Callam, who read the citation, called Gato a committed Christian who has drawn "upon biblical theology, integral mission, training and community development to assist groups and persons to overcome national rivalries and ethnic differences." In his acceptance remarks, Gato said "This award is recognition of the resilience of all Rwandans. The award is a great encouragement to me to continue to strive for the wellbeing of my brothers and sisters. I feel reenergized in the calling to work for peace." (bwa.org/news)

Why? Gato writes: "We are driven by the idea of making the church a home of peace, to help build a culture of peace in the church where Christians deal with problems that arise within and outside the church...Reconciliation is God's initiative. God is peace. God's mission is to reconcile people with Himself, reconcile people with each other, and reconcile all creation to Himself. The church is established to fulfill God's mission...It should prepare Christians and others to engage in in-depth reconciliation with God and with others, and to be in peace with the environment, taking care of the creation and working for the improvement of life." (Baptist World, July-September 2015)

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