

The Art of Assistance through Mediation in Emergency Situations

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Book Review: Berhane, the Messenger of Peace / edited by Ali Hindi, Amanda Woolley, Amanuel Yemane, Peter Riddell. Infinite Bookcase, 2023. 187 pp. (Berhane, The Peace Messenger / Edited by Ali Hindi, Amanda Woolley, Amanuel Yemane, Peter Riddell. The Endless Bookcase, 2023. 187 g.)

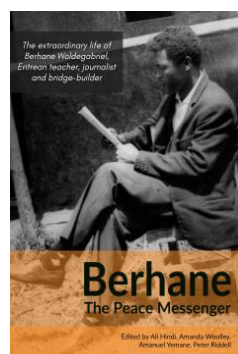
Мистецтво допомоги через посередництво у надзвичайних ситуаціях

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Рецензія на книгу: Берхане, посланник миру / під ред. Алі Хінді, Аманди Вуллі, Амануель Ємане, Пітера Рідделл. Нескінченна книжкова шафа, 2023. 187 с. (Berhane, The Peace Messenger / Edited by Ali Hindi, Amanda Woolley, Amanuel Yemane, Peter Riddell. The Endless Bookcase, 2023. 187 p.)

The book «Berhane, the Peace Messenger» can be classified more as a biography, as it describes the life of an individual who had peacekeeping goals and serves as an example for the global community in the process of uniting nations. However, it is not a hagiographic work, as it portrays the life of an ordinary person with a firm life stance. It is a collection of memories, thoughts, and perspectives from like-minded authors, friends, colleagues, and public figures from various countries about the remarkable life of a refugee from the African country of Eritrea - Berhane Woldegabriel. Among the friends and colleagues, a key place is held by the book's authors: Amanda Woolley and Peter Riddell from the UK, and Ali Hindi and Amanuel Yemane from Eritrea. Some of the memories are purely personal, thus not providing an entirely objective evaluation of the protagonist's life.

The book was published in 2023, three years after Berhane's death, and is dedicated to honoring his memory, describing his life and activities (Berhane, 2023).



Why Berhane? What is it about his life that should captivate the reader? What was so extraordinary about this person's life? These are the questions that arise when you look at the cover of this book.

Berhane Woldegabriel was born in Eritrea – a country located in East Africa – into the family of a police officer who did everything to ensure his son received a proper education. Berhane was listed among the top 200 students in Eritrea and Ethiopia, earned a teaching diploma, and obtained a bachelor's degree in history. Due to historical circumstances, the protagonist found himself at the heart of dramatic events that affected the lives of thousands of people forced to flee their homes

Стаття надійшла / Article arrived: 08.08.2024

Схвалено до друку / Accepted: 23.10.2024

as a result of political upheavals and armed conflicts in Africa during the second half of the 20th century – such as the Eritrean War of Independence from Ethiopia, regime changes, civil wars, the declaration of Eritrean independence, and the Eritrean-Ethiopian War over disputed territories. According to various estimates, more than 150,000 Eritreans died, and 400,000 became refugees during the War of Independence alone (Vakulenko-K, 2018). Berhane was one of these refugees.

The book sheds light on the complex stages of Berhane's life, from his childhood to his professional career as a teacher, lecturer, journalist, translator, refugee, public and political figure, mediator between the Eritrean community and diaspora in the UK, refugee advocate, and peacekeeper. He was a skilled educator with extensive experience in nonprofit organizations, intercultural communication, policy analysis, translation, and lecturing. He authored several articles for international journals (Woldegabriel, 1993; 1996). Berhane worked tirelessly to unite peoples, engaging Eritreans from various ethnic, religious, and political backgrounds in this process. He was a persistent and wise coordinator in negotiating agreements between leaders of different Eritrean opposition factions.

However, he was not just a «desk-bound» social manager. His social position was based on a simple formula: to be with people, study their problems directly where they arise, and find concrete, practical solutions. Berhane's art of diplomacy and leadership did not lie in trying to control the process, but in being an integral part of it.

The authors of the book recount Berhane's life and experiences, describe his behavior in various situations, and highlight his personal qualities – kind, generous, caring, attentive, decent, humble, insightful, sensitive, fair, honest, trustworthy, knowledgeable, tolerant, brave, dedicated to his work, realistic, capable of handling difficulties, and possessing unique skills such as diplomacy, tolerance, the ability to listen without judgment, being a good facilitator, a talent for reconciliation, and the ability to encourage and uplift others. He loved people regardless of their nationality or religion. At the same time, the authors note Berhane's unpredictability. His beliefs, approaches, and methods often contradicted common sense, but his success serves as an example of achieving goals in unconventional ways. This is precisely what should inspire others to follow in his footsteps.

The book «Berhane, the Peace Messenger» consists of six chapters, each introduced by a heartfelt expression that characterizes Berhane's life stages and mission:

- 1) «This is why I am here, to help my people»;
- 2) «My dear childhood friend and brother»;
- 3) «Berhane Sudanow»;
- 4) «London will be empty without him»;
- 5) «Berhane, the Eritrean peacekeeper»;
- 6) «Remembering Berhane» (Berhane, 2023).

The narrative begins with a vivid yet tragic story, dedicated to Berhane's service in the Mediterranean Sea as a cultural mediator for the charitable organization «Save the Children» an international NGO providing aid and support to children in developing countries. In 2017, Berhane made two trips aboard a ship in the Mediterranean Sea to participate in rescuing hundreds of refugees, mostly Africans, who had embarked on a dangerous and often deadly journey in small, usually unseaworthy boats to reach Europe. He took on the role of a cultural mediator, using his knowledge of Arabic and the Ethio-Semitic language Tigrinya, and was often the first to board the rescue raft to reassure frightened passengers that they were now safe. He also supported the medical team and protection experts during critical situations, such as during a rescue operation involving a sinking inflatable vessel when not everyone in the water could be saved.

For this mission, Berhane left his lecturing position in London and trained to deploy rafts at sea. His colleagues at the organization describe Berhane's unique qualities, greatly value his contribution to the team effort, and consider his actions exceptionally risky, especially since Berhane was 70 years old at the time (Riddell, 2017).

The authors highlight Berhane's principle-driven nature, persistence, and hard work, all of which are evident in his active civic engagement and public service. His participation in various social and charitable organizations and his work in the refugee resettlement program at the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as well as his role as Head of Communications for the Sudanese Commissioner for Refugees, are testament to this. Notably, in the 1990s, Berhane Woldegabriel founded the Eritrean Education and Publication Trust (EEPT), a charitable organization that helps people from the Horn of Africa develop job and life skills (Obituary, 2020; Woolley, 2020)). This organization became a platform for disseminating knowledge about methods and forms of reconciliation.

Berhane was also a member of the international organization «Initiatives of Change», which, together with EEPT, worked on establishing relationships between Eritrean opposition groups and diaspora civil organizations in the UK. Additionally, Berhane served as a trustee of the Eritrean Education and Publication Trust (Obituary, 2020).

Overall, the authors of «Berhane, the Peace Messenger» introduce readers to a remarkable, proactive, and resilient individual, revealing the rich arsenal of creative approaches and skills of a true master in fostering constructive dialogue and partnerships, no matter the challenges. Berhane Woldegabriel spent his life uniting people and believed that even enemies could become friends.

Why is it important for Ukrainians to read the book «Berhane, the Peace Messenger»?

One of the dramatic consequences of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine has

been the mass migration of the population from occupied territories and areas that have found themselves in active combat zones. The destroyed civilian infrastructure, constant shelling, and missile strikes have forced a significant portion of people to seek refuge both abroad and in safer regions of the country.

According to various sources, approximately 6.5 million Ukrainians have changed their place of residence (Za kordonom, 2024). These individuals have found themselves in unfamiliar situations and have had to actively engage in solving social and domestic problems, caring for children, and establishing communication with local authorities and residents of the new areas. Territorial communities that acted as host entities became a reliable support for internally displaced persons, while the state created the necessary organizational and legal conditions for adapting people to new circumstances.

Initially, priority issues were addressed, such as housing, obtaining financial support, and receiving humanitarian aid. However, over time, other questions emerged that initially seemed secondary. These pertain to social and psychological issues related to people's adaptation to life in new territories, the formation of respect for the mentality of local residents, the need to learn the language, and a tolerant attitude towards the customs, traditions, and standards of social-political life of the local population. The lack of attention to such matters can be easily explained. The main efforts of the leadership of Ukraine and regional and local authorities have been focused on defense measures, with significant attention given to establishing mechanisms for regulating socio-economic relations in the context of martial law.

However, there is a noticeable lack of attention from state leadership towards the social adaptation process of a significant portion of people who have been forced to leave their homes. This applies to both those who have left for abroad and those who have moved to relatively safe regions of Ukraine. Furthermore, the state's non-intervention in regulating interpersonal relationships leads to the emergence of negative phenomena within society. Although it is noted at all levels that Ukrainians have shown themselves to be a very united and resilient nation during the full-scale invasion, experts in social conflicts have observed rising tensions among displaced persons, misunderstandings both among the displaced and within the communities that receive them. Such cases create a negative backdrop to the noble mission of organizing protection for people affected by the crisis in Ukraine.

The issue of helping people who have been forcibly displaced to adapt to new living conditions is not new.

Unfortunately, military conflicts and direct armed aggression have accompanied the entire period of civilization's development. The modern world is no exception in this regard. Currently, there is a record number of wars worldwide over the past 30 years. Armed conflict is escalating around the globe, and there are currently 183 regional armed conflicts on the planet (Tsohorich, 2023). Each of these conflicts is accompanied by migratory movements, in which the civilian population becomes hostages. This primarily affects women, children, the elderly, and the disabled. Most of them face similar challenges and needs. Unfortunately, since 2022, Ukrainians have also massively joined these ranks, seeking to protect their families from the horrors of war.

Considering the research on social issues related to the organization and establishment of refugees' lives, as well as the search for effective methods for their adaptation to new conditions, the book «Berhane, The Peace Messenger» holds significant interest for scholars and practitioners in intercultural relations, interpersonal communication, public relations, and mediation. The uniqueness of this publication lies in the fact that it is not a scholarly work but rather a life story of an ordinary person - a native of one of the least developed countries in Africa - who became a well-known activist in his ethnic diaspora, mastering mediation skills and serving as a peacemaker.

Currently, in Ukraine, the book «Berhane, The Peace Messenger» is available in English on the website www.theendlessbookcase.com. However, considering the relevance of the topic and the content presented by the authors in an engaging and accessible format, we believe it is appropriate to translate and publish the text of this book in Ukrainian. This book could serve as a guide on the art of helping through mediation in extremely difficult and sometimes crisis situations.

We believe that the book will be beneficial to every reader, regardless of their age, profession, nationality, religious, or political orientation. The advice and life example of an ordinary peacemaker will be valuable to young people just starting their journey into adulthood as well as to mature adults.

For us, the reviewers, this book has become a source of energy and inspiration, and we recommend it to everyone, as it motivates, inspires, and provides essential support in solving life's problems and overcoming the fear of the unknown. It is a book that changes our attitude toward global human issues and fosters respect for each individual, imparting knowledge and teaching us to be kinder, more sensitive, and responsible, regardless of the circumstances.

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