

Addis, Ababa

June 12, 2001 – from Walta Information Center

An American Philanthropist who founded "Bridges to Prosperity" a charitable organization, has conducted an on-site survey to repair the broken Portuguese bridge on the Abay Wonz between Gojjam and Gondar zones of the Amhara State with an outlay of about 1.2 million birr.

Mr. Kenneth Frantz told WIC after his completion of the on-site survey that he decided to repair the broken bridge when he saw pictures of people crossing the bridge using a single rope on the National Geographic Magazine under difficult circumstances.

He said he decided to fund the renovation of the Portuguese made bridge otherwise known as "Sebara Dildiy" from his own savings after which he founded "Bridges to Prosperity," to assist people in getting access to market and other social facilities through out the world.

Mr. Frantz who owes a construction firm in the United States said "Bridges to Prosperity" was being funded by people "dedicated to the preposition that building bridges in countries in need will have a profound impact on their ability to develop economically."

Asked what touched his heart to reach the decision to repair the bridge after he saw the picture, Mr. Frantz said "the part that captured my heart was the struggle of men that were holding the rope with a man in the middle. At the same time I knew immediately that I could fix it. Because I am a contractor, this is what I do. To me it was a problem that could be fixed."

According to Frantz, he and his three team mates had estimated that after renovation the bridge could allow the passage of 27 million Birr worth goods annually.

He said during the on-site visit the elders in the area had promised the team to offer all kinds of assistances including the difficult job of transporting the steel bridge components to the site by the people and donkeys.

The Amhara State council had also promised Mr. Frantz's team to provide them with final go-ahead to repair the bridge before June 25, 2001 to complete the work by January 2002.

Mr. Frantz said the group received offers for the supply of steel from firms in Ethiopia and the USA. After the bridge components were fabricated, on-site, construction was estimated to take only one to two weeks for the steel and three weeks for the pier reinforcement, he added.

The bridge is located in North West Ethiopia on the Blue Nile River approximately 50 Kilometers below Lake Tana.

It was built by the descendants of Portuguese soldiers that were invited to the country by Queen mother Eleni in 1508.

According to historical documents the bridge, which had been built as a pedestrian crossing, was destroyed by Ethiopian patriots to hinder the Italian advance in the late 1930s.