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08 FEBRUARY 2014 WRITTEN BY HENOK RETA

Hiroki Addis set to manufacture leather products

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The Yokohama-based Japanese leather factory Hiroki has announced a long-term plan to produce leather products in Ethiopia.

Hiroki will be the first Japanese company to operate in Ethiopia, opening its manufacturing plant in the capital Addis Ababa as part of its 13-year operational plan. "We have been a major market for Ethiopia's sheep leather for many years and now we have come up with an idea to begin manufacturing here," Youngil Song, general manger of Hiroki Addis, told The Reporter.

Established as an incorporated company in 1960 in Naka-ku Yokohama, Hiroki became one of the first Japanese leather brands to open shops in China. The company started importing Ethiopian leather in 2005 in order to make high quality products.

Using Ethiopian lambskin the company were able to produce thin and light double-faced jackets, overcoats and skirts, which have proved popular in the Far East and European markets, according to Youngil.

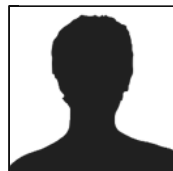
Motivated by the success of the brand products made of Ethiopian leather, it launched a new project that would introduce shoes made of sheep leather to the universal market. "We are confident that our trekking shoes and sneakers made of Ethiopian leather will boost our market all over the world," the manager said.

State Minister of Industry, Tadesse Haile, visited the Brand Shopping Mall of Hiroki in Yokohama in 2009, before the Premier dropped in last year. At the time he hailed the quality of many of the products that the company were making out of Ethiopian leather.

Hiroki moved to produce goods made from Ethiopian leather in Addis Ababa due to better access of the raw material, following the trip made by Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn in the middle of last year. So far the company has set up training projects in China to create the skilled workforce necessary to match the world-class crafts-persons working in Japan and China. "Since the company is highly committed to its brand products, the employees must adapt to the environment in which people cut and sew precisely, with full affection towards their products," the manager pointed out.

Recently, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe paid a visit to Ethiopia to stir up the long-standing relationship between Ethiopia and Japan, and to tighten the trade and investment between the two countries. "I think this inspiring step taken by Hiroki would encourage other Japanese companies to invest in Ethiopia," said Hiroe Shimabukuro, Japanese business consultant of Access Ethiopia. Hiroki has a working capital of USD 400,000, and its manufacturing industry in Ethiopia is expected to cost USD 100,000, according to the manager.

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