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**WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY: AUC Chairperson Calls for Protection of Journalists, Urges Media Practitioners to Play Rightful Role in Society**


**Addis Ababa, 03 May 2011** – The call was stipulated in the message of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC), Mr. Jean Ping, on the occasion of the World Press Freedom Day, celebrated on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2011 under the theme " 21st Century Media: New Frontiers, New Barriers".

The Chairperson's message was read by the Director of Information and Communication, Mrs. Habiba Mejri-Cheikh, during a ceremony jointly organized by the AUC, UNESCO, and the Ethiopian Ministry of Information at the Addis Ababa Hilton Hotel in remembrance of the World Press Freedom Day.



The event which brought together local and international journalists based in Ethiopia, including the Ethiopian Environment Journalists Association (ENJU) is also observed at national level in AU Member States.

Mr. Ping's message underscored that "Africa is experiencing an unprecedented change in its media landscape with remarkable entry into the social media universe hitherto reserved for the press, broadcasters and other news agencies. This context which constitutes a big challenge to the continent and the world as a whole, is at the same time, expanding the boundaries for new opportunities". He explained that, contrary to what has been the usual practice, Africa has quickly become conversant with the multiple web applications of the planet. This, Mr. Ping said, can be testified to by the Cyber activism that propelled thousands of people in the streets of Tunis, leading to the rally that gathered several thousands of people who converged at the Tahrir Square, in Cairo.

According to the Chairperson of the AUC, the use of the Internet in areas that sometimes do not have access to basic services is another unequivocal evidence to show the vivacity of Africans to be part of the global village. "However, despite the promises and the progress made in many countries in favour of the emancipation of the media and freedom of the press, freedom of expression and the liberty to information still has some cloudy

areas. Information is still considered as a symbol of intoxication and misinformation in many countries. After the Windhoek Declaration, the African Press has certainly gained some independence, but more still has to be done in order for the Press to play its rightful role in the African society” he underlined.

Meanwhile, Chairperson Ping in his message pointed out that, since May 3, 1991, the questions one might want to ask are whether Africa has sufficiently funded the media sector to enable its actors be trained well, to ensure the credibility of Press organs and whether appropriate national laws have been established to guide the media landscape. To this, Mr. Ping concluded that, “twenty years after the Windhoek Declaration, Africa still needs to take concrete steps to empower its press and expand its scope for press freedom”.

In this respect, the message of the Chairperson stressed that the African Union Commission has undertaken to make press freedom in the continent a tangible and irreversible reality; an undeniable right. “We have committed ourselves to continue the work we have started with respect to the protection of the journalists from undue intimidation and harassment, ensuring their safety, their physical and moral integrity while encouraging the practice of freedom of expression and free access to information as a fundamental right enshrined in Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, he noted.

Finally, the message of Chairperson Ping underscored the importance for all African to work together as one in order to achieve these goals. “ This can only be achieved when we work hand in hand as one; including journalists, owners of media institutions, governments, development organizations, media practitioners, civil society organizations, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations and the international community, to guarantee the exercise of this inalienable right enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, he said.

(See the complete speech of Chairperson Ping in the AU Website: <http://www.au.int> )