World Press Freedom Day marked

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ADDIS ABABA- World Press Freedom Day was marked yesterday at the hall of the new African Union headquarters in the presence of journalists, associations, government officials and other institutions with the theme: "New Voices: Media Freedom Helping Transform Society".

In his keynote address, Government Communications Affairs Office State Minister Shimels Kemal said that the government strongly believes that free press is indispensable for sustaining development, building democracy and ensuring peace in the country. Accordingly, it has made huge investment to enhance communication and information technology infrastructure including connecting the country through installing fiber optics.

"The country has also paid due attention to producing media professionals, opening journalism departments in about 17 universities," he added.

Chairperson of the African Union Commission Dr. Jean Ping, in a message read out through his representative, said that freedom of speech is of critical importance because it feeds democracy and consolidate good governance, which the world needs.

"Freedom of speech is indeed one of the most invaluable human right, and sources of social transformation. The celebration of World Press Freedom Day is also an opportunity for us to condemn in the strongest terms, attacks and unacceptable treatment practiced here and there, on journalists because they have attempted to do their work well. This commemoration gives us an opportunity to honour all those who have lost their lives in carrying out their mission," he said.

UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon and UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova joint message read out on the occasion said that freedom of expression is one of the precious right. It underpins every other freedom and provide a foundation for human dignity. "Free, pluralistic and independent media is essential for its exercise. Media freedom entails the freedom to hold opinions and seek, receive and impart information".

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and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers, as stated in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This freedom is essential for healthy and vibrant societies.

Private media journalists on the occasion denounced the government saying it is trying to put censorship on their publications through Berhanena Selam Printing Enterprise, formulating a new contract agreement which gives the enterprise the right to review the contents of the publications and decide whether to publish or not.

Responding to this complaint, Shimels said that the enterprise has the right to implement any agreement if it believes important to deal with its customers as it is a trade entity. "Therefore, the contract agreement the enterprise trying to implement has nothing to do with censorship, as it is not an administrative body of the government, adding that it is illogical to present the issue as if it violates the constitution," he underlined.

The Day was marked with a discussion on the present press freedom trend in the country, social media in transforming societies in Ethiopia and the like.