Statement for World Press Freedom Day 2012

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President

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I’ve been told to be very brief and I’ll be brief indeed. I want to thank the Director General of UNESCO, my friend Mrs. Bokova. It is the second time we meet in a month, which shows good cooperation. Thank you, Minister, thank you friends who are here, and thank you for accepting our invitation for this lunch.

I want to thank the Tunisian Government for hosting this event, I could not think of a better host for such an event at this time.

Now, I have only two points to make. The first point is that the idea that freedom and development are separate things is now known to be a myth. We know that there are two sides of the same coin – you fail in one, you fail in both. My presence here as head of Africa’s Development Institution is to affirm our conviction that our work of development begins with encouraging larger freedoms for the People of Africa and I’m happy that many African journalists are here.

Much progress has been made but we have to move even faster. And this is my last point: whether you look at the collapse of the Berlin wall, or the Arab Spring, the revolt of the people was directed at their leaders who were denying them freedoms but also failing to deliver on their missions. If you look at Africa this time we are the second fastest growing continent in the world, but there are two problems: Poverty is not coming down fast enough and we are not creating enough jobs for the people.

These are things which have no quick fixes. No government can create the jobs that people want in one year. It is a challenge here in Tunisia already -the expectations are very high. That is the reason why you need more freedoms, not less, so that citizens can be helped and contribute to the solutions and governments to be held accountable. That can only happen in an environment where you members of the press are free to interact with the citizens.

I’m very much encouraged by the progress in Africa on this issue. I think our presence here today shows how far we have come. We have much ground to cover and I want to say to you that in the African Development Bank you have a very strong supporter.

I thank you for accepting our invitation I wish you “bon appetit” and thank you for coming to Tunis.