

Fulbright Specialist Lecture

On July 11, Professor Sheikh Umarr Kamarah from the Department of Language and Literature at Virginia State University delivered a lecture at the U.S. Embassy on “Language and the Law: Linguistics and the Search for Justice.” Professor Kamarah, an American citizen of Sierra Leonean origin, visited Freetown for two months under the auspices of the State Department’s Fulbright Specialist Program (FSP). He worked with faculty and students at Fourah Bay College to introduce the discipline of forensic linguistics into the curriculum. This little-known areas of linguistics focuses on how people use and interpret language in legal situations, with an emphasis on clarifying misunderstandings based on idioms, class differences, and ethnic usages.

Professor Kamarah explained the origins of forensic linguistics and presented several case studies that illustrated its potential application in post-conflict societies where the “language of the law” is often a foreign tongue. He argued that this branch of linguistics had strong links to the study of law, and should be taught across curricula. His lecture was followed by a spirited Q and A session from an audience composed of over 40 persons representing academia, law enforcement, the legal profession, and civil society – including Minister of Information and Communication Ibrahim Ben Kargbo.

The Fulbright Specialist Program promotes linkages between U.S. academics and professionals and their counterparts at host institutions overseas. The program is designed to award grants to qualified U.S. faculty and professionals, in select disciplines, to engage in short-term collaborative 2 to 6 week projects at host institutions in over 100 countries worldwide. For more information, please see:

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