

Prominent Salone Journalist Visits U.S.

From October 24 to November 11, 2011, Umaru Fofana, President of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists and correspondent for the BBC World Service, participated in the Department of State's Edward R. Murrow International Visitors Leadership Program (IVLP) for journalists.



Umaru said his IVLP experience was phenomenal, especially the rich mix of the American media and how it operates-- its strong advocacy for media rights, freedom of speech and improved media practices. He was fascinated by the power of journalists in the U.S. to bring the truth to the American people and hold the leaders accountable. The forum provided the opportunity to meet with other practicing journalists from different parts of the world who shared their experiences on various subjects. The team travelled to three different states (New York, New Mexico, and Florida) as well as the District of California (DC). Each visit provided a wealth of unique encounters. Umaru was most surprised by the way that certain community radio stations are managed through voluntary donations and labor. Umaru says he

returned home resolved to continue the fight for press freedom and freedom of expression in Sierra Leone. He noted "that the strength of the U.S. is in its diversity".

The International Visitors Leadership Program has played host to thousands of distinguished visitors since its inception over fifty years ago. Program alumni include more than 200 current and former chiefs of state, 1500 cabinet-level ministers, and many other distinguished leaders from the public and private sectors all over the world. The program seeks to introduce visitors from other countries to American values, management styles and culture. Over four thousand participants are selected each year by U.S. Embassies to travel to the U.S. to meet and share experiences with their professional counterparts. Through these encounters, participants enjoy a first-hand experience of the U.S, it people and culture