



Embassy of the United States of America
Public Affairs Office

PRESS RELEASE

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U.S. Embassy to Host Talks on Role of the Press in a Democracy

FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE – From Monday, May 19 to Friday, May 23, the U.S. Embassy will be hosting Kevin Smith, a U.S. specialist in reporter protection shield laws, digital media transformation, media leadership, government transparency, and international outreach.

During his five-day visit, Smith will work primarily with the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) to strengthen the organization’s internal capacity and strategic objectives. He will also meet with media stakeholders including representatives from the Government of Sierra Leone, civil society organizations, Guild of Editors, and the Independent Media Commission to discuss the role of the press in a democracy as well as the future of journalism around the world. Smith visit also includes a private movie screening and discussion with final year mass communication students at Fourah Bay College. A keynote address and panel discussion on the relationship between press, government, and the public is scheduled for Tuesday, May 20 at the British Council Hall.

Smith’s visit is part of the U.S. Embassy’s continued commitment to strengthen democracy and good governance through a vibrant and independent press. During his most recent visit to Africa earlier this month, Secretary of State John Kerry said, “A free and unfettered press is fundamental to any functioning democracy. That’s true in the United States, and it’s true across Africa.”

Embassy Public Affairs Officer Boa Lee added that Smith’s visit builds on the Embassy’s previous work with journalists in Sierra Leone. In 2012, the Embassy hosted an investigative reporting training that benefited 18 journalists. It also gave more than \$13,000 last year to SLAJ and Journalists for Human Rights to conduct capacity training exercises and has sent about 10 local reporters to the U.S. in the previous three years to network, engage in mutual learning and cultural exchange, and conduct interviews.

“The United States continuously works to advance media freedom around the world through bilateral engagement, public diplomacy, programming, and multilateral diplomacy,” Lee said. “The Embassy has a strong relationship with the Sierra Leone media and we are excited about this program’s potential to help chart the way forward for ensuring that the local press can continue to play an important role in Sierra Leone’s development.”

Smith is the deputy director of the Kiplinger Program in Public Affairs Journalism at Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. He served as president of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) for two years and has served on the association's national Ethics Committee for 23 years, and as its chair for six years. Smith has lectured on ethics and press rights around the world and has over 20 years of journalism experience.

For more information and updates about this program, follow the U.S. Embassy's Facebook page: <http://goo.gl/UIIYE8>

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