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Speaker dims diamond's shine 'BLOOD DIAMONDS' BLAMED FOR AFRICAN POVERTY

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Diamonds may be a girl's best friend, but former child soldier and leader of the Africanist Movement in Sierra Leone and West Africa said they are sources of poverty and turmoil in his country.

More than 90 people gathered in UF's Rinker Hall on Wednesday night to hear Chernoh Alpha M. Bah's story of how diamonds affected his country and what Americans can do to change living conditions there.

"I have never seen a diamond," said Bah, who is also an award-winning journalist. "When I came to America, I saw people wearing diamonds on their fingers all the time. Every diamond in America is a blood diamond."

Bah was 12 years old when he joined the army during the civil war that plagued Sierra Leone from 1991 to 2000. Displacing 200,000 citizens of Sierra Leone, the civil war stemmed from a division Bah said the British colonialists created between the country's northern and southern regions after they left the country.

"The conflict happened because a group of nations wanted to seize our resources," Bah said. "We were poor with no money to go to school."

ReKeithen Miller presented the history of the diamond trade in Africa and discussed how British nationalist Cecil Rhodes, the benefactor of the Rhodes Scholarship, used the diamond trade to exploit and subdue African nations in the late 1800s. Bah spoke about how De Beers and other companies in the diamond trade profited from African laborers who mined the minerals for less than \$1 a day.

Bah stressed that all people of African descent, whether born in Africa or America, should join to fight what he termed the "New Imperialism" in Africa.

"The situation in Africa was set in the place by the imperialist system," Bah said. "I see students reading and trying to decide about their future. But in Sierra Leone, most of us are having our futures taken away from us. I don't have a future."

Both Bah and a member of the African Socialist Movement who accompanied him stressed that Africans should be placed in charge of their own affairs.

"I think Mr. Bah can give students an understanding of Sierra Leone they would not have gotten from textbooks or teachers," said Gabriel DuPree, director of speakers for International Month.



Tim Hussin / Alligator Staff
Former child soldier and journalist Chernoh Alpha M. Bah speaks to a crowd of about 90 people at Rinker Hall on Wednesday night about his experiences with civil war and the diamond industry in Sierra Leone.