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"THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE"

Some jewels not friendly

Conflict-free diamonds best

By Lorinda M. Bullock
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - During the holiday season, enamored boyfriends and husbands often choose diamonds to make a romantic statement. But this season, the Warner Brothers film, "Blood Diamond," and hip-hop mogul/ entrepreneur Russell Simmons are using the gems to make a global statement about diamond mining in Africa.

And not everyone understands what that statement is — or agrees with it.

Last week, Simmons returned from a nine-day "fact-finding" mission in Africa, where he visited some of Africa's largest diamond mines in Botswana and South Africa, promoting the use of conflict-free diamonds. He also announced his "Green Initiative" that will give 25 percent of net proceeds from his Simmons Jewelry Company's men's line to schools and hospitals of African mining communities through the Diamond Empowerment Fund.

New to the jewelry business, Simmons' launched the Simmons Jewelry Company in 2003, one of few, if any, major Black-owned fine jewelry companies in the world. So far, co-owner Kimora Lee Simmons' Baby Phat and "Hello Kitty" women's lines have grossed \$10 million this year, he said.

In 2003, government, non-government and diamond industry officials came up with the Kimberly Process Certification Scheme to keep conflict diamonds from being sold on the international market. Conflict diamonds are generally defined as those mined in certain zones in Africa and are used to fuel or fund civil wars.

Simmons grappled with the definition of "conflict-free" in an interview with the NNPA News Service.

"I don't know what conflict-free means... Still it's a conflict when you're standing on a natural resource, whether it be a diamond, or oil, or uranium, or gold — anything — and you're poor. And so that's what Africa has, so we want to find places and examples where natural resources really benefit the people," Simmons said.

During Simmons' visit that included meetings with a number of African dignitaries and former South African president and anti-apartheid leader, Nelson Mandela, Simmons said he was particularly impressed with one country and its treatment its people.

"Certainly the example in Botswana, where the number one diamond mine in the world exists, was inspiring," he said. "[It's] a place where 35 to 40 percent of the people have HIV and yet they have the best HIV programs in the world and they're really doing a lot of good work there... All the education, the schools—just about everyone in the country is funded by the resources of the diamonds. Eighty-five percent of all the profits that come out of the ground go back to the Botswanian government," Simmons said.

According to the Embassy of Botswana's website, just 30 years ago, Botswana was one of the 20 poorest countries in the world. In 2000, Botswana exported \$2.2 billion worth of diamonds. The country of 1.7 million people has been recognized by Transparency Interna-

(See Diamonds, Page 12)

Nevada troops hit home

By Frank Armand Albano
Sentinel-Voice

A contingent of 70 men and women of U.S. Air Force 99th Security Forces that were deployed in Iraq for the last eight months have made it home for the holidays. A blue and white jumbo jet, a converted L1011, touched down at Nellis AFB on schedule at 5:15 Tuesday afternoon. Their one-year tour of duty was cut short due to their various job descriptions.

On hand to meet and greet the returnees, some carrying "Welcome Home" signs, were a crowd of well-wishers, family members, including friends, along with some

small children and infants in arms.

As the men and women dressed in battle fatigues, carrying backpacks, began to emerge from the aircraft and make the 200-yard trek to the Base Operations Hanger, a roar went up from the crowd as they pushed their way towards Air Force security guards and a retractable barrier.

Walking in almost single file, the vets slowly covered the distance as the crowd, recognizing their relatives and friends, pushed past the barrier.

What developed past that point was a mass of bodies (See Nellis, Page 2)



Special to the Sentinel-Voice

Members of Nellis' 99th Security Forces arrived home for the holiday season, after an eight-month deployment in Iraq.

Annan sharpens Bush critique

INDEPENDENCE, Mo. (AP) - U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan took his criticism of the Bush administration to the nation's heartland Monday, saying America must not sacrifice its democratic ideals while waging war against terrorism.

In the hometown of President Harry Truman, who helped found the United Nations, Annan said "human rights and the rule of law are vital to global security and



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— Kofi Annan
U.S. Secretary-General

prosperity."

"[When the U.S.] appears to abandon its own ideals and

objectives, its friends abroad are naturally troubled and confused," Annan told a

packed audience at the Truman Presidential Museum and Library.

Annan also said the U.N. Security Council should be expanded to better reflect today's world.

Annan, an increasingly vocal critic of the war in Iraq, leaves the United Nations on Dec. 31 after 10 years as secretary-general. He chose the Truman museum for his final major speech in part because it is dedicated to a president who was instrumental in the organization's founding.

In response to a question after his remarks, Annan said he was appealing for cooperation and leadership, not criticizing the United States.

"What I am saying here is that when the U.S. works with other countries in a multilateral system, we do extremely well," Annan said.

The U.S. has a special responsibility to the world because it continues to have extraordinary power, he said.

In Washington, the State Department was reserved in its reaction to Annan's remarks.

"There's no secretary general of the United Nations that's going to be in lockstep with the United States or any (See Annan, Page 3)



SOUL-SINGING SANTA

R&B sensation Ne-Yo, who has won various music awards and went to high school at Rancho, hands out gifts to young people last week at Doolittle Community Center.

Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy