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Territory's First Summit on Gun Violence Prevention to be Held on St. Thomas

The event tackles the territory's high gun violence rates through collaborative discussions featuring community and faith leaders, law enforcement, and global experts

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Pastor Gilford Monroe

The USVI's first Summit on Gun Violence Prevention, [scheduled for July 4 and 5](#), aims to holistically tackle the territory's staggeringly high gun violence rates through discussions between community leaders, faith leaders, and Virgin Islands residents.

?The summit's host, Pastor Gilford Monroe, is St. Thomas native now based in Brooklyn, New York. He told the Consortium that his personal experience with gun violence in both St. Thomas

and the mainland is what moved him to work in community-driven gun violence prevention. “I’ve always had the awareness of how do we save generations of young black boys, and so I started this work many years ago when a young man was shot and killed on the same block of the street in which I pastored in Brooklyn,” Mr. Monroe said.

More than three years ago, Mr. Monroe worked with the USVI Department of Health to draft the bill that ultimately led to the creation of the Virgin Islands Office of Gun Violence Prevention. He sees the summit— which the pastor described as “looking at best practices and models and multi-prong approach for gun violence prevention” — as an extension of his previous work and advocacy.

Despite the territory having one of the highest gun violence rates in the world, Mr. Monroe said “it’s not even the amount of violence that I’m looking at because one death is too many. It’s the callous act and who’s being caught up in the violence.” For Mr. Monroe, the issue is psychological. “I’m from West, you from someplace else, therefore you’re my enemy. So that’s the type of thing that we are trying to unravel. It’s a mindset,” the pastor told Consortium journalists. Mr. Monroe said he therefore supports creating community partnerships and a “safety net for young people,” rather than advocating for the enforcement of stricter gun laws.

He hopes that the attendees that the event will likely attract — “parents, law enforcement, government, agency leaders, elected officials, but more importantly, survivors” — will contribute to creating the community partnership he believes is vital to the reduction in gun crimes in the territory.

“People are hurting because of the loss of life and so we want to talk about what that looks like and how we can support those individuals,” Mr. Monroe noted, describing how his personal target audience for the summit is the survivors of gun violence whose family members were victims.

Panel discussions slated for next month’s summit include “The Power of Empathy as a Common Community Denominator,” and the “Unseen Wounds: Exploring the Psychological Impact of Gun Violence” given by a variety of leaders from around the world, who Mr. Monroe described as the “best and greatest minds.”

The summit is free for all attendees. According to Monroe, the event is just one step in a larger process of community building. That step “involves a community realizing that together we’re better,” he believes.