

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Coffelt: Recent Homicides Are Gang-Related, Government Silence Is 'Deafening'

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Former Virgin Islands Attorney General Soraya Diase-Coffelt released a statement Wednesday in light of escalating gun violence in the territory, tying many of the killings to gang-related activity, and calling upon the territory's leaders to take swift action in quelling the mounting blood shed by undertaking "a collaborative effort to do so with an understanding that gangs exist here."

"As an attorney and former judge, I have seen the negative effects that gang-related violence has had on our young men in particular and on our community as a whole," Diase-Coffelt began. "Over the past two weeks, we have experienced an escalated number of shootings, including drive-by shootings, and killings. Today, there was yet

another shooting and killing on St. Thomas."

The [recent killing](#) of Lakeel Wade near the Lionel Roberts Stadium in St. Thomas was the result of gang-related violence, Diase-Coffelt said, pointing out that he was featured in a 2010 documentary titled "Gangs in Paradise," which delved into the gang scene in the territory.

"There is no doubt that we are seeing the repercussions of the growing influence of gangs. On February 1, 2015, the senseless killing of Lakeel Wade took place in the Hospital Ground area of St. Thomas. Lakeel was featured in the 2010 documentary entitled "Gangs in Paradise" when he was 19 years old and serving a five-year sentence at the Golden Grove Correctional Facility on St. Croix," she said. "After being released from jail, he apparently went right back to being involved with a gang, resulting in his death. Wade's unnamed male companion that day also suffered gunshot wounds but survived."

The documentary in which Wade was featured can be viewed immediately below.

[Watch the original video](#)

The former judge also pointed out that on Feb. 6, "there was a drive-by shooting in the late afternoon on St. Thomas, in which two men suffered multiple gunshot wounds."

Attorney Diase-Coffelt further recounted [Monday's Estate Grove Place homicide](#) on St. Croix, stating that the neighborhood was also featured in the 2010 documentary.

"On February 9, in the area of Eulalie Rivera Elementary School on St. Croix, another man was found dead as a result of multiple gunshot wounds. It was reported that an AK47 was found on the scene. This is the same area known for gang violence that appeared in the Gangs in Paradise documentary," Diase-Coffelt said.

Diase-Coffelt then spoke on what she says is the "deafening silence" from the Mapp administration, as the government has detailed no plans as to how it intends to quell the violence.

"Amidst all this growing violence is a deafening silence surrounding what our government is planning to do to combat it," she said. "Despite many attempts over the past years, our Legislature has yet to adopt any form of anti-gang legislation. This is imperative."

She then questioned how much more gun violence would be seen in order for the government to take action.

"How many of our young men and others have to die before we undertake the necessary prevention, prosecution, and rehabilitation steps to fight gang violence? It is critical that our government officials undertake a collaborative effort to do so with an understanding that gangs exist here. The people are crying out for action," Diase-Coffelt said.

Diase-Coffelt was [tapped by Governor Mapp](#) to be the territory's Attorney General in January, but resigned her post after only two weeks on the job because of Mapp administration dealings she said that would have hampered her from effectively performing her duties. She detailed her reasons for resigning in a [widely popular](#) statement.

