

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Letter To Editor: It's Time to 'Step Up' Against Gun Violence... This Is Our Home!

Opinion / **Published On June 09, 2016 01:07 PM /**

Staff **June 09, 2016**



Dear Editor,

Let me get straight to the point, because I am sick to my stomach of what I see: What are we going to do the stop the escalated level of gun violence in and around our neighborhoods and establishments?

The continual talk about the need to do something and the consistent lack of effective strategy and action are inadequate and insufficient. Talking about the issue or around the issue or continuing to detail what might or might not work has its merit. However, the blood continues to run through the streets. The only absolute fact is that people we know

are being gunned down. Mothers, fathers, children, co-workers, other loved ones and a tightly knit community are left to grieve in an atmosphere of fear. Each murder or violent act directly impacts each of us, because each victim, or perpetrator, is a member of someone's family, a co-worker, a friend, a classmate or an acquaintance. With each killing, the Virgin Islands' community loses more and more of its humanity and its quality of life.

For me, this is a very personal matter and it's beyond disturbing. About 7 years ago, my wife's 19-year-old nephew was shot 5 times for a gold chain in a drive-by robbery. Thankfully, one bullet missed his spine by less than an inch. Three years ago, my mother's eldest brother was on island to attend my mother's funeral, only to be caught in the middle of a robbery/shoot-out in the parking lot of Kmart during high day. Two years ago, a family member's 15-year-old son on St. Croix was shot in the head in a robbery near a convenience store, leaving him an invalid for life. Many years ago, my father's brother was shot dead for no apparent reason while driving through Nadir. Yesterday, I was informed that an employee's nephew was gunned down over the weekend.

Many of us may be able to reflect on an incident of gun violence, or violence in general, that has dramatically changed our lives or the life of a family member or friend.

As individuals, and as a collective community, it's time to "step up" from conversation and take affirmed action. Everyone must play a constructive part to assist and support law enforcement to solve open cases; to show up for jury duty; and, to support community groups and organizations that work with vulnerable and at-risk families and young people. More importantly, we must stop making excuses for persons we know who continually make our community and neighborhoods unsafe through illicit and criminal-like activities. And we must stop encouraging, whether passively or deliberately, an environment that enables lawlessness. This is our home!

It's beyond time to take some direct responsibility and to demand better of ourselves, of our children, of our community! This is our home!

Submitted on Wednesday by:

Moleto A. Smith, Jr., St. Thomas Resident