

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Influx Of Guns Into Territory Has Changed Dynamics Of Crime; Police Commissioner Says

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ST. CROIX -- The spate of criminal activity on this island over the weekend which left three young men dead -- one on Saturday night during [a drive-by shooting](#) and the other [at birthday party held at the Altona Lagoon](#) in Christiansted -- represents the brutal ramifications of an influx of guns into the territory that has amplified police work and embolden the criminal element, Police Commissioner Delroy Richards, Sr. told The Consortium on Monday.

The weekend deaths bring the territory's total to 37, with 24 involving guns in St. Thomas, another deemed an altercation and yet another as a vehicular homicide. St. Croix's total is 12, with 10 being gun deaths and two victims who died when their moped was [struck](#)

[by a truck](#), and [one vehicular homicide](#) in St. John.

"The influx of firearms into this territory have changed the dynamics. There are no longer fistfights or a fight with sticks where you'll be able to come back tomorrow and apologize," Mr. Richards said. "It is something that's ended most of the times right there and then, so it's sad."

The commissioner sounded exasperated by the level of brazenness demonstrated by the suspect who killed the two 18-year-olds at the Lagoon. He deemed the act as a clear demonstration of the lack of respect for humanity; with little regard for who gets caught in the crossfire.



"They have no regards for the lives of others. They continue to recklessly discharge shots and I have no sympathy for them," Mr. Richards said. The commissioner told this publication on Monday that [a suspect was in custody](#) and that police would soon release more information to the public.

And police have changed their approach, the commissioner revealed, because these days victims of gun violence rarely report the suspects to police, even if the victims are well aware of who attacked them. Instead, they employ a revenge mentality so police must now try to anticipate and prevent retaliatory action.

"One of the sad things about this is that, when you have that type of shooting, I always tell people -- and sometimes they say maybe I shouldn't say that, but I have to be realistic, I am a realist -- somebody out there already know who the perpetrators are within the circle of the group that got shot, and even though they might relay it to the police, they're going to respond, so that's what we have to look out for now, that response, because we don't know when and where, but we know that's the trend."

He said that this kind of attitude amounts to young men walking around with the grim reaper on their backs, "and somebody is going to target you." The commissioner also reached out to parents, "because the victims are so young, and I'm sure the perpetrator is young also."

Governor Kenneth Mapp, for his part, said the violence must get worse before police get a handle on how to properly prevent gun crimes.

"I've got a bit of bad news that, as governor, being honest with the community, I must share," he said [during a press conference](#) at Government House here in April. "The violence is going to be brought under control, but there is going to be more violence and

there's going to be more homicides and more shootings before we arrest this problem because we have to catch up. The government has to catch up with a lack of officers on the streets, the lack of law enforcement personnel. We have to catch up because we've done little in the past modernizing our department and resources. [We have to give] equipment and tools to our law enforcement personnel, we are behind in what we've done to train them. We are behind because our partnerships with our federal law enforcement partners prior to this administration was practically nonexistent. The ATF (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms) was not even in the Virgin Islands. And none of what I'm saying is ascribing any blame to anyone; I'm just saying as governor, this is the raw reality."

The governor said his administration's efforts have caused change, "and as we bring these resources to the table, as we bring additional boots on the ground, as we infuse more equipment and resources to our police department, as we train and upgrade all levels of policing in the territory, that is when policing in the community will begin to see a different change in this outward violence that we see," he said.

Mr. Mapp went on to list the new abilities that will eventually come online once these initiatives take hold. "We will have the capacity to target, we will have the intelligence-gathering capability to take people down before they're able to commit many of these violent acts that we are seeing. We're going to have to ask the Senate to make some minor adjustments on the statute having to do with the possession of firearms so people that we know that are bringing in firearms legally [through] their luggage into the Virgin Islands, to deal with that issue just by a simple change to our local statutes.

"Until all of these realities are aligned, there's going to be outbursts of violence and there's going to be outbursts of shootings, and that's an unfortunate reality, but to be very candid, that is the reality," Mr. Mapp said.

He added: "I want to be clear, I'm not saying to the Virgin Islands community that the government is doing nothing until all of these things have occurred, because the police commissioner, myself and the U.S. Attorney — we have been coming before the Virgin Islands community and updating you on the changes, infusions, partnerships and on the training.

"But in fifteen months we're not going to go from outward massive violent shootings in the community to none. And so we hope to see less of it, but I'm going to tell you we're going to see more as we go into the future, until we get ourselves completely retrofitted, positioned and resourced that we can really bring this problem to a screeching halt and only have exceptions rather than the normal course of action."

Feature Image: Officers inspect red Honda Civic that was riddled with bullets near Central High School on Sept. 5, 2015. (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, VIC)