

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Attorney General Decries 'Recent Trend' Of Photo-Sharing Of Accidents And Dead Bodies To Social Media

Crime / **Published On June 20, 2018 09:26 AM /**

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ST. THOMAS -- Attorney General Claude Walker on Tuesday held a press conference denouncing what he said was the recent trend of residents hustling to scenes of accidents and crimes, snapping pictures of dead bodies for the "thrill" of it and sharing it with their friends on social media.

Joined by Medical Examiner Dr. Francisco Landron and Assistant Attorney General Carol Jacobs, the attorney general spoke in willful terms in an attempt to quell the practice, and said criminal action would be considered on a case-by-case basis -- especially if the

matter includes tampering of evidence.

The A.G. said it is wrong to snap photos of dead bodies "for the purpose of distributing such images to friends on Facebook or WhatsApp for some sort of entertainment or morbid fascination."

He added, "Here in the Virgin Islands, even if you are an atheist, if you're not a religious person, it's still widely understood and accepted that a human corpse must be treated with the highest degree of respect and dignity." Mr. Walker later clarified to The Consortium he was not insinuating that atheists or non-religious persons somehow enjoy participating in such behavior.

Asked by The Consortium of instances where the images may have been shared by first responders, Mr. Walker acknowledged that such occurrences have been documented and, in at least one case, an employee was disciplined.

"Unfortunately we have received information that part of this problem involves some of the actual first responders," Mr. Walker said, "not understanding their obligation to ensure that a dead human is treated with integrity, and therefore they shouldn't take pictures of the body just to send to their friends for a thrill."

Mr. Walker spoke of an incident that occurred a few years ago, where a woman died in a car accident on the waterfront in St. Thomas, and a first responder took a picture and circulated it to friends. "I believe that person was reprimanded and may have been terminated," Mr. Walker said, adding, "there is a problem there as well and therefore we are aware that if we take an action, it may include a first responder who is involved in this."

In fact, Mr. Walker said oftentimes the circulation of the images occur when a first responder take a picture and send it to a friend, "and then it just continues," he said.

Following the press conference, Mr. Walker told The Consortium that the denunciation of the act did not mean that he would be arresting citizens, lest, as already mentioned, in a rare instance where a crime scene is tampered. He said the press event and willful language was meant to deter residents from what he said was trending behavior in the territory.

Mr. Walker also acknowledged that there have been cases, especially on the mainland, where citizens have taken photographs and videos of crime scenes that have led to positive results -- including the apprehension of perpetrators or providing crucial evidence to a case that would have otherwise went unsolved. And nor was he trying to trample the Constitutional right of Americans of chronicling the work of law enforcement, Mr. Walker said.

Giving an example relative to when he would take action, Mr. Walker said if a dead body had already been wrapped up and ready to be taken off a crime or accident scene by a medical examiner, and someone opens the bag to snap a picture or shoot a video, he would take action "because you're now tampering with evidence," he said.

Feature Image: A crime scene on St. Croix on September 5, 2015. Attorney General Claude Walker has said the sharing of images of people involved in accidents and criminal activity, which he said has become a recent trend in the U.S. Virgin Islands, should stop.

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