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VIPD's 'Operation Eagle Eye' Nets 8 Arrests on New Year's Day for Celebratory Gunfire; Some Suspects Face up to 10 Years in Jail

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From upper left to right: Dejeni Sweeney, Clyton Grouby, Eustace E. Charles, Jemari Forde, and Elvis M. Villar. By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT

The V.I. Police Department proved it was serious about arresting individuals who shot celebratory gunfire into the air on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, arresting a total of eight suspects — four on St. Croix and four in the St. Thomas-St. John District — while detaining a total of sixteen individuals.

V.I.P.D. officers along with other law enforcement personnel across the territory participated in "Operation Eagle Eye" to address the illegal discharge of gunfire on New Year's Eve and New

Year's Day. During a press conference held on Jan. 1, Police Commissioner Trevor Velinor said the officers were relentless in their pursuit to arrest individuals who, even after multiple warnings from the police department, still went ahead and shot gunfire into the air — most with unlicensed firearms.

From east to west on both islands, there was illegal discharge of gunfire, the commissioner said. Mr. Velinor said while officers crisscrossed the islands, they were supported by [ShotSpotter technology](#), which helps the V.I.P.D. pinpoint the direction and location of gunfire.

"Almost without fail, all the communities had some form of gunshots. It's irresponsible, it's not right," Mr. Velinor said during the press briefing.

The commissioner praised law enforcement officers, stating, "They went towards the illegal activity. They did not run from it." According to police spokesman Toby Derima, the operation was planned for several months, with some officers embedded in several communities.

Police Chief Steven Phillip of the St. Thomas/ St. John district denounced the act of illegal gunfire. "We have elderly individuals who wanted to go to church and had to hear these gunshots," he said. "That should not happen."

St. Croix Police Chief Sidney Elskoe commended the assertive engagement of his officers, according to Mr. Derima. "Our officers recognize that our community deserves peace while embracing the new year," Chief Elskoe said.

Among those arrested in the operation on St. Thomas was Jamari Forde, age 29 of Tutu Valley; Shomari Maximea, age 28 of Habetts Gade; and Trevor Martin, age 49 of Michael J. Kirwan Terrace, according to Mr. Derima. The V.I.P.D. did not provide all the mugshots, and it appears the name of at least one suspect was missing from the V.I.P.D. release.

On St. Croix, police arrested DeJani J. Sweeney, age 23 of Estate Glynn; 23-year-old Elvis M. Villar of Orange Grove; 27-year-old Cylton Grouby of Golden Grove; and Eustace E. Charles Jr., age 19 of Williams Delight.

Operation Eagle Eye resulted in the seizure of 17 firearms, to include high powered rifles and hand guns, Mr. Derima said. Officers detained 16 individuals during the operation, resulting in 8 arrests. Criminal charges include illegal possession of firearms, public endangerment, and illegal discharge of firearm, charges Mr. Velinor said could land suspects in jail for up to ten years.

Police Chiefs Elskoe and Phillip urge the community to call in with information on crimes by calling 911, the Criminal Investigation Bureau on St. Thomas at (340) 774-2211, the Crime TipLine on St. Croix at (340) 778-4950, or anonymously at (800) 222-TIPS.