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## 'I Will Not Turn a Blind Eye to Senseless, Age-Old Practice' of Celebratory Gunfire, Bryan Says, Praising Velinor, Officers

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**Firearms confiscated by the VIPD during New Year's Day/New Year's Day 'Operation Eagle Eye' By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT**

Governor Albert Bryan late Sunday lauded the Virgin Islands Police Department and Commissioner Trevor Velinor for an operation on New Year's Eve into New Year's Day [that led to 8 arrests and over a dozen firearms being taken off the streets.](#)

Called Operation Eagle Eye, VIPD along with other law enforcement personnel crisscrossed the islands from east to west, aided by ShotSpotter, and led a successful initiative that removed illegal firearms from the streets. The results should dampen upcoming New Year's Eve celebratory

gunfire.

"There is nothing celebratory about firing bullets in the air and terrorizing peaceful Virgin Islanders attending church or enjoying their New Year's Eve festivities," Mr. Bryan said in a statement. "As governor, I will not turn a blind eye to this senseless, dangerous, and illegal age-old practice and congratulate the Virgin Islands Police for a job well done on its response."

He added, "The success of Operation Eagle Eye is another example of the commitment and bravery of our men and women in the Virgin Islands Police Department and an example of our administration's continued efforts to beat back the criminal element and remove illegal weapons from our streets.

"Our community is safer this evening because of the leadership of Commissioner Velinor and those brave officers who confronted those suspects and confiscated those 17 illegal weapons."

During a press briefing held on New Year's Day, Mr. Velinor said, "Almost without fail, all the communities had some form of gunshots. It's irresponsible, it's not right."

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.