

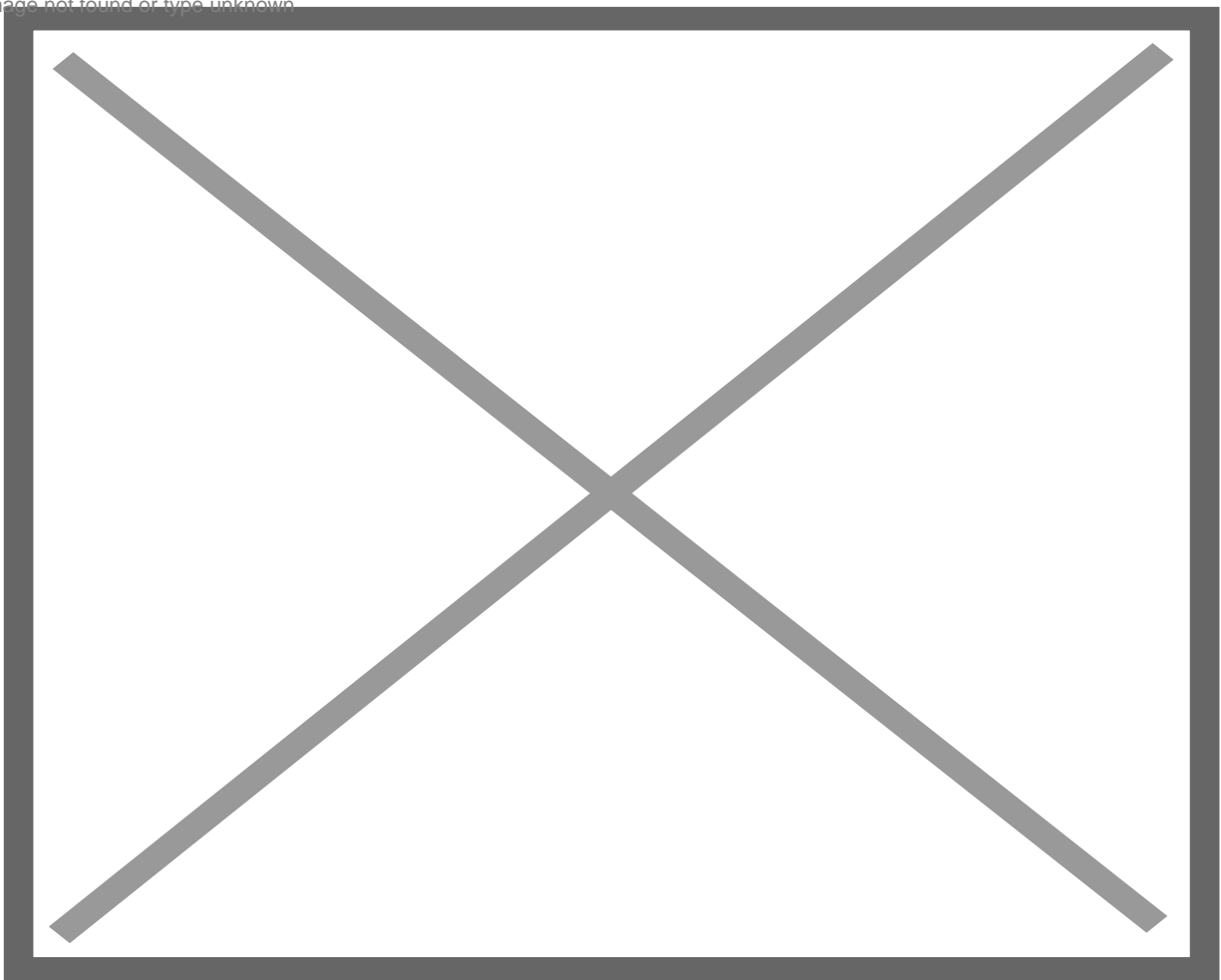
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# After 30 Years of Mounting Violence, USVI Has no Forensic Lab and No Surveillance Cameras; Governor Bryan Says Residents Support Criminals by Not Speaking Up

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In September 2015, a state of emergency was declared following multiple shooting incidents on St. Croix, including the one pictured above showing a Honda Civic riddled with bullet holes. By. ERNICE GILBERT FOR VI CONSORTIUM

St. Croix experienced seven homicides in five days -- from Saturday through Tuesday -- while nine other victims were injured in a spate of violent events that shook the island. From a 23-year-old man in a nightclub, to a 66-year-old woman at her home, [last weekend](#) was unlike none other in modern history in the territory. An eighth victim as of Wednesday was confirmed to be

braindead and was on life support.

After four deaths between late Saturday night and early Sunday morning, the V.I.P.D. [held a press conference](#) and Governor Albert Bryan [issued a statement](#). On Monday, Mr. Bryan elaborated on his comments during the administration's Covid-19 response update, and said Virgin Islanders support the criminals because residents have refused to provide information on these crimes.

"The reality is we as a community support these criminals. All these bad actors. We support them because we don't speak up and speak out until it comes home to visit us, and even then we are reluctant," Mr. Bryan said. "But we express all the shock and the outrage about who didn't do what and who's responsible for what, and direct the anger at everyone but the people who are pulling the triggers."

The governor added, "When is it we're going to get mad enough to say we're going to go and make sure that the people who did this come to justice. With thirteen people wounded in this territory, somebody has got to know who did what and be able to talk about it.

"But when we make these acts about what the law-abiding citizens are not doing -- we care more about what the police didn't do, and first responders, what they didn't do -- we absolve the criminals of the responsibility of the crime; of the raucous and heinous acts that they're committing everyday in our community, and we allow them to live another day free on the streets while our friends and family [are] under six feet of dirt."

Mr. Bryan said the violence "leaves behind a trail of trauma that affects every single one of us Virgin Islanders."

Yet even as Mr. Bryan calls on the community to do its part in sharing information to authorities, the government has failed to equip itself with the necessary tools that would supplement the lack of details being provided by Virgin Islanders who have been afraid to divulge what they may know, fearing endangering their lives.

One of the most successful crime-fighting and crime-prevention tools is surveillance camera, with multiple research studies showing significant reductions in criminal activity where the cameras are installed. In May of 2020, Mr. Bryan [said](#) closed circuit television (CCTV) surveillance cameras would have been installed by the end of that year, but the cameras, to this day, have not been erected. When asked about the cameras following last weekend's spate of killings, V.I. Police Department Commissioner Trevor Velinor stated that Smart Net, a local company, said some of the cameras would be up and running by July, 2021.

"The last update that they gave us, which was a little bit less than a month ago, was that by July 27, 2021 the first phase [which includes] 100 plus cameras, will be completed in the territory," Mr. Velinor told the Consortium on Feb 28. "We are now navigating towards getting that up."

The commissioner said crimes are solved in four ways, including through surveillance camera technology, which he said "absolutely helps right away." Another way is through DNA, fingerprinting or other scientific breakthroughs that allow for identification. The commissioner then spoke of law enforcement officers being witness to criminal activity as another way crimes get solved quickly.

Lastly, he spoke of information provided by the public as "the most important way" crimes are solved, though Mr. Velinor did not give the basis relative to why someone sharing information about what they may know is more effective than an officer who witnessed a crime, DNA

identification that ties an individual to a crime, or cameras that identify persons involved in a crime.

On at least two of these fronts, the V.I.P.D. and the local government have failed: 1) The installation of surveillance cameras has yet to become a reality, even though homicides have tarnished the USVI for -- according to Mr. Bryan -- the last 30 years. 2) The territory does not have a forensic lab where DNA identification could be performed, which would lead to speedier results.

The third item Mr. Velinor mentioned is law enforcement being on a crime scene. This effort was hampered in the past because police learn of incidents after they happen. The territory now has ShotSpotter installed in various locations throughout both districts, but it was not clear whether they've led to officers arriving on a crime scene earlier.

Mr. Bryan did not speak to the government's failures, instead, the governor reminisced on a time he said the V.I. was a more peaceful place. He expressed confidence that the territory can recapture those times. "We just have to get fed up enough and say we're not going to take it anymore." Mr. Bryan said that of the territory's roughly 110,000 population, less than 1 percent are gun-totting criminals. "So the 99,000 [rest] of us need to be brave enough and bold enough to put it to a stop."

He said the administration would do all in its power to crackdown on criminal activity, but "all the police in the world, all the cameras in the world, would not stop anybody from a random violent act and shooting in a nightclub or in a vegetable market, or on any random corner in the Virgin Islands. But you could do something about it and make sure that it never happens again. Because if you know something, then you should say something."