

The Virgin Islands Consortium

With 13 Homicides in USVI For 2022 and Only One Solved, VIPD Pleads With Community For More Tips

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Police respond to a shooting incident in Estate Paradise on St. Croix in 2020. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

"We're piecing the puzzles together without all the pieces and I'm just asking for your help in putting the pieces together."

Those were the words echoed by Criminal Investigation Bureau Chief, Lieutenant Naomi Joseph during a police press briefing on Tuesday where she pleaded with residents to help the police solve numerous serious crimes in the territory.

“When we get to the crime scene the crime has already happened. The individual is already dead or removed and taken to the hospital. We get to a crime scene where all the witnesses that were there have already vacated.

“We then have to come and put a puzzle together without all the pieces and the pieces that we’re missing are the individuals who were there, who saw, who know,” Lieutenant Joseph told media.

She shared that from January to June 2022, officers had already recorded 169 cases and had arrested 35 people. Seventeen (17) of those arrested were in connection to gun crimes.

She said that a total of 43 guns were removed from the streets between January 2022 to June 2022 which include 35 hand guns, 2 air pistols, 4 rifles, 1 BB-gun and 1 air rifle. This was accomplished with tips from residents and police patrols, she added.

“By the 20th of July we had 24 homicides. I pray not to pass this but I know I’ll be unrealistic in believing that we have all decided to put our guns down but I’m hoping that the community can help these families,” the officer remarked.

On January 17, 17-year-olds Odonnie Heywood and Jahny Ledesma [were gunned down in Castle Coakley](#), becoming the first two homicide victims for 2022.

Lieutenant Joseph said officers found over 250 spent cases on that scene describing it as “a war with two 17-year-olds and an adult who was the driver.”

A number of people were also killed inside their homes in the first half of this year.

According to information from the police, in 2019, they recorded 22 homicides, 26 in 2020 and 32 in 2021. So far this year, only 13 homicides have been reported to police. For the 2022 homicides, the department has been able to solve only one so far.

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Joseph spoke on the need for more prosecutors, telling Virgin Islanders that the police is only a part of the system required to solve crimes.

"Maybe what we need is more prosecutors on the bench but until that happens, because we only have one, we're stuck with what we have."

She emphasized that the police alone cannot prosecute and bring justice to these crimes, explaining that the other arms of law enforcement including the court must work with them to accomplish this.

“If the court tells me I cannot get a warrant to come and search the house that you told me have guns, and you know have guns and the court is telling me I can’t go in, [then] I can’t go in,” she said.