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Family and Friends of Murder Victims Gather For Healing, Easing of Pain Through Testimony

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A banner with the names of murder victims on St. Croix. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

A small group of individuals filled a room at the Women's Coalition of St. Croix facility in Christiansted on Sunday, dressed in red attire in observance of the National Day of Remembrance for Murder Victims.

The National Day of Remembrance, September 25, was designated by the U.S. Congress in 2007. The purpose of this day is for homicide victim advocates and supporters to commemorate murder victims and surviving family members. It also honors the work of various organizations that provide services, including support, advocacy, and counseling for families, individuals and communities coping with homicide-related deaths.

WSCS holds events and activities in support of surviving loved ones and offer opportunities to express their feelings and bring more attention to the violence that plagues the St. Croix community. The Wall of Remembrance, a visual presentation of the names of murder victims on St. Croix since 1974, is a highlight of that day and is updated annually. Throughout the program, words of healing and inspiration, breathing exercises and activities to include writing a note to a loved one was conducted.

Senator Kenneth Gittens, a former law enforcement officer, captured the audience with his sentimental remarks. "I am glad that my daughter is no longer a police officer because now I could sleep at night," he said. "I really [knew] how my mom felt. My mom never shut her two eyes until I came through the door." Mr. Gittens also spoke of efforts as a lawmaker to revamp the criminal justice system.

Abdul Ali, a radio personality, spoke to the proliferation of gun violence in the territory. "When it comes to gun violence, the reality is no gun has ever gone off on its own. You have to get the gun, you have to put the bullets in, you have to aim it and then you have to pull the trigger," he shared.

Sheelene Gumbs, crisis counselor at Women's Coalition and host of the event, presented a Silent Wall PowerPoint presentation. "This is a Silent Wall and as it runs, please understand that it is not a complete wall," she said. "These are the names that we do have." The Silent Wall runs for about 15 minutes and it has 108 slides with 6 names per slide.

Over the years victims of gun violence who survived have been guest speakers at the annual event. This year it was held at the Women's Coalition Community Space Terrance in Fisher Street, across from the Adventist Church in Christiansted and not at the traditional Fort Christiansvaern location, as construction work is being conducted at the latter.