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Jamaica Security Forces Said to Be Making Inroads on Gangs

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A gang member holding a Kalashnikov rifle at a house in Kingston, Jamaica By. THE NEW YORK TIMES

JAMAICA — Jamaica Minister of National Security, Dr. Horace Chang, is assuring the nation that the security forces are unwavering in their efforts to nab gang members and dismantle their activities, the government of Jamaica has said.

Speaking to Reporters at the Old Harbour Police Station in St. Catherine on February 24, after touring stations in the parish, the minister said that with the recent conviction of a major gang leader from the parish, and another one set for trial in the Court, and scores of their members in custody, it is a clear indication that their control and influence on communities are steadily being

weakened.

“We have convicted four brutal killers, and you have 50 members of one of the major gangs taken to court. The police officers have taken in nearly 60 bad gangsters. They are doing the work, and they are not going to let up,” Mr. Chang said.

According to the New York Times, Jamaica is awash in illegal weapons. The Jamaican authorities, who estimate that 200 guns are smuggled into the country from the United States every month, routinely ask American officials to examine some of the weapons they seize in raids, during traffic stops or at the ports, the Times said.

The paper said that of the nearly 1,500 weapons the A.T.F. checked from 2016 through 2018, 71 percent came from the United States.

The figures are similar in Mexico, which has been lobbying the United States for more than a decade to stop the illegal guns flowing south. By some estimates, more than 200,000 guns are trafficked into Mexico each year, many to feed the vast criminal networks fighting over the multibillion-dollar drug trade to the United States.

But here in Jamaica, the killings are rarely driven by such enormous profits. The drug trade has fallen from its heyday, organized crime has been fractured and most of the historic kingpins have been killed or imprisoned, the Times said.

Instead, the guns in Jamaica are often used in petty feuds, neighborhood beefs and turf wars that go back decades, to when political parties authored the majority of the country’s violence.

Mr. Chang pointed out that the dismantling of criminal gangs is at the top of the government’s crime reduction strategy, as gangsters are responsible for most of the murders on the island as well as other major criminal activities.

“We are going to increase the pressure on them, I can assure the country on that. It is a priority for the Government, which is why we are spending the resources on it. The first priority is to disrupt the gangs, and save lives,” he said.

Mr. Chang further noted that the government will be amending the Anti-Gang Act in a short while, to give the police “additional tools”, so that members of criminal gangs can face other penalties for their actions.

“And, we are putting in efforts in the medium term to divert our young males, especially in our inner-city communities, to give them an alternative to gang life,” the minister said.

Mr. Chang, personnel from the ministry, and senior officers from the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) visited the Bog Walk and Old Harbour police stations to view rehabilitation works at both facilities, according to the government.

Mr. Chang also told the journalists that improvement in communication and mobility will be undertaken at the stations, while upgrading of the Old Harbour Bay police station is being considered.