

# Gangs and youth crimes

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**(PRESS RELEASE VIA SNO)** – As the death toll continues to increase, the government has yet to formulate an affirmative course of action to reduce the levels of gun and gang-related violence among the youth.

Following from the Crime Symposium held on November 24th 2017, the State has provided limited information regarding what alternatives will be implemented to tackle this growing and frightening epidemic. The overarching concern is that many young males will continue to lose their lives through senseless acts of gang related retaliation.

The president of the Caribbean Mentorship Institute, Ms. Felicia Dujon, is adamant that young men are losing their way at very early ages in their lives. Boys as young as 13 years old are murdered due to gang-related violence. Dujon states that “ We need to distinguish between gun violence and violent crimes.



Felicia Dujon

The government should make a deliberate effort to address violent crimes where guns are the weapons of choice. We are overlooking key components where access to guns are concerned; for instance how are illegal guns being funded? In addition, we need to ensure that existing laws on gun violence reflects our current society. Laws alone cannot resolve gun violence, we should also perceive gun violence as a health issue due to the financial burden it places on our healthcare.

Dujon adds that youth involved in gun violence have lost hope in themselves and their communities. They feel hopeless without any real solutions to feel secure about their future. Many of them are high school dropouts, some are unemployed, while some are on the streets trying to escape the poor living conditions in their homes and communities. In addition, we have observed the numbers of young men with mental health issues which triggers various forms of anti-social behaviors- all of which must be addressed.

This is a human rights issue – a fundamental issue in which these young men are marginalized by social and economic disparities. It is also a gender issue inasmuch as the concerns of young boys are not being addressed effectively. They do not feel that they are part

of a society, a culture in which they should be included. They have little educational and developmental opportunity – so gang life becomes a matter of survival and not an individual choice.

They are being discriminated against because of where they live – a ghetto life has less value than that of the average citizen. We need to be more inclusive in our approach with our young men. We need to invite them to our policy meetings and ensure that their voices are being heard. We cannot implement solutions when the beneficiaries are not included in the processes that will affect their lives.

The prevention, reduction and punishment of crime cannot be achieved holistically if these youth and their communities are not included. A major nationwide anti-gun advocacy is needed to educate, sensitize and address the growing gun -violence epidemic which continues to plague our country.

In a report submitted to the UN Human Rights Council in September 2015 as part of the country's Universal Periodic Review, the government of Saint Lucia states that "[in recent years, Saint Lucia has had the unfortunate experience of dealing with a myriad of gang related activity".

According to a survey of public perceptions on security in six Eastern Caribbean countries, including Saint Lucia, conducted between January and March of 2016 by the Latin America Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), 87 percent of respondents in the surveyed countries stated that "gangs had little or no effect in their neighbourhood" adding that, "overall, perceptions of gang activity across all [surveyed] countries are low" (LAPOP 27 March 2016, 32).

According to the US Department of State's 2017 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, "[m]any of the homicides that... occur [in seven Eastern Caribbean countries, including in Saint Lucia] are a result of turf wars between organized groups fighting for control of drug distribution" (US March 2017, 151).