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### So Eugene, When Is All The Killing Going To Stop?



By Abigail Witherspoon

3 HOURS AGO

This morning, two families will wake, if indeed they have slept at all, to face the devastating hole of loss. One is the family of 15 year old, Illam Petrescu, who was shot dead in a drive-by incident on Friday night, the seeming latest victim of gangland reprisals that are playing out across the city. The other, are the loved ones of Khaled Aoun, 19, a quiet and studious Lebanese student who was making his way home along a quiet suburban street, during the early evening, on his way back home from visiting his mother in hospital. Khaled was stabbed in the heart in what appears to be a motiveless slaying.

There is nothing to connect these two incidents except the fact that they are part of what is increasingly being cast as an epidemic of fatal violence across our capital city. Guns, knives, killing, that seems to be becoming the order of the day. Two on Friday. One on Thursday. Three on Wednesday. Sixteen murders in one week. Extrapolate that across the entire year. It makes 832. Eight hundred and thirty two distraught families. Eight hundred and thirty two holes in people's lives. That's nearly five times as many as the 181 killings in 2005. An extraordinary statistic, of frightening proportions.

A former senior police officer, who elected to remain anonymous, has warned that Grandton Police Service appears to have lost control of Grandton's streets, accusing the GPS leadership of "deafening silence" as the capital's murder toll soars, and appears to be rising week on week. And, he warned, the violence could get worse.

Plenty has been said and written about "budget cuts" and "new demands on police taking officers off the street". Indeed, it was only last Wednesday that yet another Home Office document leak, revealed that, "controversially", "a fall in police numbers is likely to have contributed to a rise in serious, violent crime." "We are getting tired of hearing the refrain from communities that we don't see the police around any more" and "it appears to people as though the police have lost touch with public spaces and the streets". We are tired of hearing the politically induced rhetoric that the "challenges must be set against a backdrop of sustained reductions in policing numbers and increased demand for our services". And I wonder if our liberally oriented assertions that "frustrations are building up because people feel lack of control of their destiny, because, there are no youth clubs, that young people feel they had no access to the wealth they see that others have, that there is a bigger divide between the haves and the have nots" is merely window dressing that obscures much deeper and malevolent social forces that we don't have the courage to name.

Senior, inside sources from GPS tell me that a lot has changed since Eugene Scott-King took over as commissioner from Sir David King in April 2017. They tell me that there is a calmer, more empowered leadership. That there is greater respect. That the service has actively sought to address diversity challenges, to increase trust, to be more open to external collaborations, to embrace technology, to genuinely listen to the needs of the people in the communities it serves.

But those claims seem to have done little to ameliorate the profound concerns of those who have criticised GPS chiefs for their lack of visibility after this week's rise in violence and those that are decrying Mr Scott-King's commitment to "launch a taskforce of 140 officers to increase our presence on the streets, to proactively tackle the rising violence, as well as direct more officers to violence hotspots and invest in deploying specialists in covert tactics", as short-termism, and a reckless failure to fundamentally address the underlying causes of social discontent.

I put it to you Mr Scott-King. GPS may be changing. You may be taking it earnestly forward, transforming it into a genuinely diverse, agile, customer-centric and community focused police service. But those of us on the outside, don't see much turning of this huge, cumbersome tanker. And, moreover, I don't think the families of Illam Petrescu and Khaled Aoun will be much interested, right now, in hearing about "digital leadership" and "cultural shift". The question they are more likely to want an answer to, sir, is when is the killing going to stop?

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23 Havre Lane  
www.lecoutoursbistro.co.uk

