

PROTECTING YACHTING TOURISTS

The Marine Industries Association of St. Lucia (MIASL) is assisting the authorities in the fight to reduce crime against the island's yachting tourism sector. President of the MIASL, Keats Compton in a statement issued this week, said that the Association had proposed a number of concrete measures to the Ministry of Tourism in order to reduce the incidence of criminal acts against members of the visiting yachting fraternity in Rodney Bay, Marigot and Soufriere.

These measures are: The introduction of a special short-code (e.g. HELP) distress telephone number at appropriate locations at Gros Islet, Marigot and Soufriere – police station or Port office; Locating a VHF radio with dedicated emergency channel along with the phone; Placing billboards at appropriate locations advising of emergency numbers and crime prevention tips; Producing leaflets/web info with tips on basic safety precautions and important phone numbers; Instituting a requirement that all small flotation devices which can be used to move from shore to yacht, such as kayaks and surfboards, are secured ashore by their owners, or be subject to confiscation; The publication of these initiatives in appropriate media; Discussion with SLASPA on extending patrols to the ports of Marigot and Soufriere; Training boat-boys and others to "meet and greet" yachting visitors

The Aquarius Incident

The initiative by MIASL follows a crime committed against the owners of a visiting yacht, the Aquarius, in Rodney Bay last month. On Sunday, Jun 18th Christine Belaud from France and Francis Abeln, a Dutch citizen, traveled from Martinique to Rodney Bay on their yacht Aquarius for what was meant to be a routine electrical maintenance job by Egbert Charles of Rodney Bay Marina. The Customs post at Rodney Bay Marina had closed for the day, so they anchored outside of the Marina entrance, where they would spend the night before clearing Customs the following morning.

What followed has been the subject of much media comment and prompted a torrent of emails from justifiably outraged cruisers – three men boarded the Aquarius at about midnight, allegedly bound and assaulted Francis, and two of the three allegedly proceeded to commit rape, following which items were stolen and the culprits made good their escape.

Quick Action By The Authorities

This was by far the most serious assault against the yachting fraternity in recent memory. However the authorities and members of the local yachting sector moved quickly to aid and comfort the traumatised couple and to catch the perpetrators of the crime. The Minister of Tourism, Hon. Phillip J. Pierre paid a personal visit to the couple to express his regrets. Rodney Bay Marina provided the services of a counselor and Egbert Charles, stayed with the couple throughout Monday. The Marine Industries Association of St. Lucia (MIASL) kept in close touch with the Royal St. Lucia Police Force, in an effort to ensure that the facts surrounding the case were accurately disseminated.



Rodney Bay Marina, Gros Islet

Three suspects, aged 16, 17 and 33 years, were arrested within one week of the incident. The three were arraigned on Jun 30th charged with robbery, two with rape, with the third charged with assisting rape. They were all remanded in custody. All the charges are indictable, and maximum sentences are severe.

Christine and Francis were at the Magistrate's Court and were requested to reappear at the preliminary hearing on Jun 12th, where evidence was taken from both of them, with assistance from an interpreter in Christine's case. Throughout their ordeal, Francis has commended the support from the Police, public, Rodney Bay Marina and the MIASL. More evidence will be taken from Police and others at the continuation of the preliminary hearing on Aug. 8th, following which the magistrate will rule on whether the case should be referred to the High Court.

Much has been made of whether the authorities have adequately discharged their responsibilities, specifically, whether sea patrols were or were not being conducted using a boat provided by a group made up of Rodney Bay Marina and three members of the MIASL, for that purpose. According to Keats Compton, there has been some confusion surrounding the deployment of the boat and this may have been caused by reports appearing in some media several months ago, that the patrol boat had been formally handed over to the Port Authority.

The facts are that Aquarius was attacked on the evening of Sunday Jun. 18th, whilst the boat was delivered to the Port Authority on Tuesday Jun 21st, by prior arrangement with Rodney Bay Marina the week before. The reality is that the Marine Police were on the scene within 10 minutes of receiving a call from the Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre (MRCC), based in Martinique, which Francis contacted once he managed to free himself. The Marine Police had in fact been patrolling the area earlier, but obviously did not encounter the three. Meanwhile

the Police have acknowledged the role played by members of the public in coming forward, willingly, to assist them in fingering the suspects as quickly as they did. The Courts must now decide on their innocence, or guilt and punishment.

Other Miasl Measures

In addition to the proposals that the MIASL has sent to the Ministry of Tourism, the President of MIASL, Keats Compton, says that the Association is taking other practical steps to combat crime against visiting yachtsmen and women. According to him, MIASL has asked its members to donate fixed line telephones; redundant vehicles – to compliment existing ones at Marigot and Gros Islet. The Marigot Bay Business Association (MBBA) has produced a RHIB for use in the Bay, and MIASL is discussing its use with Ports & Regular Police.

MIASL has also requested the donation of a Jet-ski to the Marine Police as a quick response vehicle; its Safety

& Security Committee (comprising Customs, Marine, Ports & Regular Police plus MIASL) is considering arrangements for the Soufriere Bay area, which they intend to place before the authorities soon. Patrols are ongoing at the Rodney Bay Seaport and they are expected to become a regular feature at Marigot and Soufriere.

Statistics from the Safety & Security Net are now factored into the country's national crime records – special thanks to Second Millennium. The St. Lucia Hotel and Tourism Association's (SLHTA) Management Council (which includes MIASL) expects to meet with Government to discuss the crime situation on the island. MIASL has welcomed the Prime Minister's recent announcement that seven UK policemen would soon begin an attachment to assist the Royal St. Lucia Police Force, as has been done in Jamaica, and so it intends to ensure that its interests receive equal consideration with land-based anti-crime measures.



HIGHLIGHTS

Sat. July 22nd to Fri. July 28th 2006

NTN – PROVIDING INFORMATION YOU NEED

CWC Officials discuss food & security ahead of CWC 2007 – Sat. July 22nd, 9:30 a.m.

From the archives of the GIS: Prime Minister's Tour of Castries South. - Sun. July 23rd, 9:30 a.m.

PROUD is a programme geared towards rationalising lands for persons occupying crown lands - Mon. July 24th 7:30 p.m.

How does a hurricane develop? Find out much more information about hurricanes on "Hurricane Watch" – Tues. July 25th, 8:00 p.m.

Get the tips needed to cope with arthritis - Wed. July 26th, 8:00 p.m.

Travel through Haiti and learn about the sufferings and triumphs of a people deliberately oppressed – Thurs. July 27th, 8:30 p.m.

Christian Wayne and Danielle Beaubrun discuss their swimming exploits on "Sports Talk" – Fri. July 28th, 6:30 p.m.

Remember to tune in for:

GIS News Breaks and Kweyol News daily from 6:30 p.m.

Issues & Answers/Mondays at 8:00pm:

Interview/Tuesdays at 6:15pm :

Konsit Kweyol/Tuesdays at 8:00pm (Kweyol Discussion):

Your Right to Know/Thursdays at 6:15 p.m. (Min. of Ed. Prog).

Take 2/Fridays at 6:15pm (Week in Review)

Weflechi/Fridays at 6:40pm - (Week in Review—Kweyol)

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Contact us at: The Department of Information Services, Greaham Louisy Administrative Building, The Waterfront, Castries, St. Lucia, West Indies
Tel: (758) 468 2116; Fax (758) 453 1614; E-mail: gis@candw.lc; <http://stlucia.gov.lc>