

■ \$230,000 C3 shooting and robbery...

Business community calls for action

■ Khamarie Rodriguez

IN THE aftermath of the shooting and robbery of a businessman at the C3 Shopping Centre in Corinth, San Fernando, the area's business community is calling for an example to be set by the protective services in apprehending and prosecuting criminals. The owner of Soft Steps, a shoe and bag store located on level one of the mall, was confronted by two armed men in the car park at around 7.45 p.m. on Saturday.

'The bandits pointed a firearm at the owner while he was standing near his white Toyota Hiace van, taking the keys to his vehicle along with \$230,000 in rent collected from tenants and sales from the store.

One of the men fired a shot, hitting the victim in the chest, police said, before escaping in the businessman's vehicle.

Police stated that the victim was treated at the San Fernando General Hospital and was in stable condition as of Sunday.

His vehicle was later located by police, abandoned at Charles Street in Gasparillo.

Speaking to the *Express* on the robbery yesterday, Greater San Fernando Chamber of Commerce president Kiran Singh condemned the acts of violent criminals, referring to the incident as a 'horrible' and 'appalling' incident.

Singh said it was evident criminals had little to no respect for the ongoing state of emergency which was implemented by Government to curb the crime problem.

He said it was necessary for the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and other security forces to act and improve detection rates.

'It is unfortunate that we are in a state of emergency and these criminals have no respect for the law, for authority for law-abiding citizens making an honest dollar. They have no respect for that statute, they continue this crime pillage, on a rampage without any repercussions. We need to set some serious examples when criminals are caught.

'The businessman did not lose his life, but this is appalling news from the business community that one of our hard-working businessmen who was closing his store and his earnings from his sales will probably now be lost forever. He will also have to find some way to recoup those losses and deal with the psychological losses of a robbery, and violent robbery at that,' Singh added.

He said that the shooting could have a psychological effect on both shoppers and business owners who may be hesitant to venture to commercial spaces.

Typically, he said, such targeted robberies were not frequent in the San Fernando region.

However, he said he hoped the recent events would not spur more violence.

'We are wondering how they would target this man, identifying him in his vehicle. We know C3 mall tends to have police officers patrolling regularly. Hopefully, they will be able to use the camera footage to apprehend these criminals before it gets worse, and we hope this is not the start of a trend of robbing business owners as we had a relatively safe Carnival.

'Businessmen in the South are not usually robbed or shot or anything like that. Of course, it does happen and any loss of life or robbery is one too many. We hope the southwest and southern division of the TTPS will bring the criminals to justice if possible,' he said.

He also urged shoppers and owners to be vigilant and mindful when carrying out transactions.

'The majority of shoppers in this country are women and they tend to be seen as easy prey by the criminal elements. We are hoping they are mindful and do not go with large handbags or sums of money to shop...We unfortunately live in a country where crime is higher than we want it to be. Business owners should take more protective action like having security or an escort to move large sums of money so they do not become targets,' he said.

Crime scene investigators over the weekend recovered one 9mm shell from the area in which the robbery occurred.

The owner's vehicle was towed for processing at the Forensic Unit in San Fernando.

CCTV footage from the car park has also been obtained by police.