

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Five Foreign Nationals Face Sentencing in USVI for Drug Trafficking and Illegal Entry

Five men from different backgrounds confront the legal repercussions of their actions in the Virgin Islands

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ST. THOMAS — The United States Attorney's Office in the District of the Virgin Islands announced on Wednesday guilty pleas and sentences for five foreign nationals on trial for offenses committed in the territory.

According the release, 28-year olds Pedro Ramos Ramirez and Johnny Arias Rodriquez, as well as 26-year old Gerald Cruz, 26 all admitted to a cocaine trafficking conspiracy.

On December 29 2022, the Puerto Rican nationals were on a go-fast vessel operating without navigational lights north of Stumpy Bay, St. Thomas when Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine Operations spotted them, according to court documents.

Authorities observed a light flashing from the vessel with an answering light flashing from the shoreline, and attempted to apprehend the boat. However, the captain of the vessel attempted to flee, zigzagging erratically through the water while the other two tossed bales of cocaine overboard. CBP AMO officers ultimately disabled the vessel and recovered 75 kilograms of cocaine from the ocean.

A district judge will now determine sentences for the three men, who are each facing a maximum fine of \$10 million and a possible mandatory sentence of 10 years to life.

Meanwhile, 31-year old Yefri Martinez-Herrera, from the Dominican Republic, was sentenced to 168 months in prison after pleading guilty earlier this year to charges of conspiracy to possess cocaine, as well as possession with intent to distribute cocaine. Martinez-Herrera admitted to working with a co-conspirator to sell an undercover agent 200 kilograms of cocaine. A search warrant executed by federal agents at the French Town home of Martinez-Herrera on February 3 2022 yielded 87 kilograms of cocaine, a firearm in the bedroom, and Martinez-Herrera himself hiding in a closet.

Finally, a Chinese national was sentenced to time served after admitting to entering the United States illegally. Xiaoling Li, 32, traveled from China to Suriname, authorities say, where he paid \$7500 for traffickers to transport him to St. Thomas by boat. Customs and Border Protections officials stopped him as he tried to board a New York-bound flight on August 2. He has no record of applying for or receiving authorization for entry into the United States.