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# Dominican Republic National Sentenced for Large-Scale Cocaine Trafficking in U.S. Jurisdiction

## Major Drug Interdiction at Sea: U.S. Authorities Thwart Cocaine Smuggling Operation

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ST. CROIX — United States Attorney Delia L. Smith on Thursday announced the sentencing of Leandro De Los Santos, a 33-year-old national of the Dominican Republic. Santos received a 70-month prison term following his guilty plea to charges of possessing and intending to distribute a substantial amount of cocaine while aboard a vessel within United States jurisdiction.

The case unfolded on September 11, 2022, when the United States Coast Guard Cutter U.S.S. Billings, during a routine patrol south of the Dominican Republic, intercepted a suspicious go-fast vessel. The vessel, found approximately 80 nautical miles south of Bani, Dominican Republic, was unmarked – displaying no flag, registration numbers, or name on its hull. The Dominican

Republic Navy later confirmed that the vessel was not registered in their country, rendering it a stateless entity and thus subject to U.S. jurisdiction.

Onboard, the Coast Guard team detained De Los Santos along with Victor Reyes-Martinez and seized a significant haul of 630 kilograms of cocaine. Reyes-Martinez, who also pleaded guilty to related charges, was sentenced earlier on March 30, 2023, to 57 months in prison.

The successful apprehension and subsequent prosecution of these individuals were the result of collaborative efforts by the United States Coast Guard, Homeland Security Investigations, and the Drug Enforcement Administration. Assistant United States Attorney Evan Rikhye led the prosecution.

This case is part of a broader Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) investigation. The OCDETF program plays a crucial role in disrupting and dismantling major drug trafficking and money laundering networks, gangs, and transnational criminal organizations that pose a threat to the United States. It employs a strategic, intelligence-driven approach, combining the expertise of multiple agencies under a unified prosecutorial command.