

Three Ecuadorian Nationals Plead Guilty to Smuggling 800 Kilograms of Cocaine

Luis Menocal-Mero, Carlos Baque-Pincay, and Carlos Anchundia-Mero admitted to drug trafficking after the U.S. Coast Guard intercepted their vessel with 800 kilograms of cocaine near the Galapagos Islands. They face up to 20 years in prison.

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Three Ecuadorian nationals have pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court to drug trafficking charges after authorities intercepted their vessel carrying 800 kilograms of cocaine in international waters.

United States Attorney Delia L. Smith announced on Friday that Luis Menocal-Mero, 41, Carlos Baque-Pincay, 23, and Carlos Anchundia-Mero, 24, admitted to Conspiracy to Possess with Intent to Distribute a Controlled Substance While on Board a Vessel Subject to the Jurisdiction of the

United States. Their guilty pleas were entered before Magistrate Judge Emile A. Henderson III.

According to court records, the defendants were apprehended on March 8, 2023, when the United States Coast Guard Cutter Farragut detected and intercepted a go-fast vessel during a routine patrol. The vessel was spotted approximately 110 nautical miles southeast of the Galapagos Islands, Ecuador, in international waters.

The vessel was not flying any national flag or bearing any nationality indicators, prompting U.S. authorities to conduct a right of visit boarding under maritime law. During the boarding, Menocal-Mero, Baque-Pincay, and Anchundia-Mero were found aboard. One crew member attempted to claim Ecuadorian nationality for the vessel, but Ecuadorian authorities could neither confirm nor deny the claim. As a result, the vessel was classified as stateless and determined to be under U.S. jurisdiction.

A search of the vessel uncovered 30 bales of cocaine, totaling 800 kilograms.

Sentencing for Menocal-Mero, Baque-Pincay, and Anchundia-Mero is scheduled for July 16, 2025. Each defendant faces a maximum sentence of 20 years in federal prison. The final sentence will be determined by a federal district court judge, who will consider the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors before issuing a ruling.

The case was investigated by the United States Coast Guard and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). Prosecuting the case is Assistant U.S. Attorney Daniel H. Huston.

This prosecution is part of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) operation, a federal initiative aimed at identifying, disrupting, and dismantling high-level criminal organizations that pose threats to the United States. The OCDETF program is a prosecutor-led, intelligence-driven, multi-agency initiative targeting drug trafficking networks and transnational criminal enterprises.