

The Virgin Islands Consortium

French National Sentenced To 24 Months In Prison For Alien Smuggling

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ST. THOMAS -- District Court Judge Curtis V. Gomez today sentenced Alain Rene Leichtnam, 71, a French national, to 24 months in prison for alien smuggling, United States Attorney Ronald W. Sharpe announced via press release this afternoon.

Leichtnam also was ordered to serve two years of supervised release, 200 hours of community service and pay a \$3,800 special assessment.

On August 12, 2015, Leichtnam pleaded guilty to encouraging and inducing aliens to enter the United States in violation of law. As part of his plea, Leichtnam admitted that on April 29, 2015, the sailing vessel Mazurka, operating with no lights, entered United States

waters heading towards CoralBay on the East End of St. John, Virgin Islands. The vessel was intercepted by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents who observed Leichtnam operating the vessel and identified 38 Cuban nationals and one St. Lucian national onboard. CBP agents observed that the vessel was grossly overloaded and did not have a sufficient number of life jackets and life rafts for the number of people on board. Leichtnam admitted that he transports people to the United States for financial gain knowing that such conduct is unlawful.

"Those responsible for encouraging and inducing immigrants to enter the United States illegally are placing personal profit ahead of public safety and the lives of the immigrants," U.S. Attorney Sharpe said. "This conviction should warn those involved in this dangerous and illegal activity that it comes with a high price."

"ICE continues to be committed to putting an end to the practice of profiting from the illegal transportation of aliens across our borders and throughout our country. We will continue to vigorously enforce the federal laws which punish the many manifestations of the complex problem of smuggling, trafficking and harboring illegal aliens," said Angel M. Melendez, special agent in charge of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

"Tragically, many have lost their lives while attempting this illegal and treacherous trip. Human smugglers have a callous disregard for the value of human life and are only concerned about making a profit. ICE will continue to aggressively work with our U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) partners to identify and arrest those involved in this illicit and dangerous activity," he added.

The case was investigated by ICE with the assistance of CBP and the United States Coast Guard. It was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Kim L. Chisholm.