

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Additional Venezuelan National Pleads Guilty To Possession Of Controlled Substance On Board Go-Fast Vessel Carrying Multiple Kilos Of Marijuana

Crime / **Published On September 22, 2018 11:03 AM /**

Staff **September 22, 2018**



ST. CROIX -- Manuel Rodriguez, age 32, of Venezuela, pleaded guilty on September 20 in District Court to one count of possession of a controlled substance on board a vessel, United States Attorney Gretchen C.F. Shappert announced.

According to the release, this federal offense carries a possible sentence of up to 40 years in prison, a maximum fine of up to \$5,000,000 dollars, and a term of supervised release of at least 2 years. Sentencing is set for January 23, 2019.

According to court documents, on May 8, 2017, at approximately 7:50 p.m., a patrol aircraft associated with the Joint Inter-Agency Task Force South located a northbound go-fast vessel (GFV) approximately 105 nautical miles west of Martinique traveling at a speed of 25 knots. Located in a known drug trafficking route, the vessel had five outboard engines and contained multiple fuel barrels and suspicious packages which were visible on deck.

The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Donald Horsley was directed to intercept the vessel. Upon arrival, the crew of the GFV were observed tossing the suspicious packages and fuel barrels overboard. Ultimately, the crew of the Cutter Donald Horsley recovered 8 bound packages, which contained approximately 162 kilograms (357 pounds) of marijuana. The defendant was one of seven Venezuelan national crewmembers onboard the GFV.

Rodriguez is now the sixth defendant to enter a guilty plea. Co-defendant Juan Rodriguez previously entered a guilty plea on August 13, 2018. Co-defendants Jesus Garcia and Jhoan Gomez entered a guilty plea on August 15, 2018. Co-defendants Felix Gomez and Rosauro Morao entered a guilty plea on August 22, 2018. The Coast Guard Cutter Donald Horsley is a 154-foot Fast Response Cutter homeported in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The case was investigated by the United States Coast Guard and the Drug Enforcement Administration. It was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Daniel H. Huston.