

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Tortola Man Arrested For Smuggling Haitian Nationals Into St. Thomas

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ST. THOMAS -- Ernest Williams, 25, of Tortola, was arrested Wednesday on a criminal complaint charging him with bringing illegal immigrants into the United States. Daline Ambroise, 23, Presuma Venette, 19, Paul Jn Augustine, 36, and Jordan Ambroise, 36, all nationals of Haiti were also arrested Wednesday on criminal complaints charging each of them with illegal entry into the United States, United States Attorney Gretchen C.F. Shappert announced.

Williams, Ambroise, Venette, Jn Augustine, and Ambroise all made their initial appearances before Magistrate Judge Ruth Miller and were detained pending further proceedings.

According to the complaint, Williams was operating a boat that was stopped by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Air and Marine Operations (AMO) coming from the British Virgin Islands. The agents observed that Williams was operating the boat with no lights. After the boat was stopped, AMO agents identified six individuals besides Williams onboard. After inspection, the agents determined that none of the individuals was an American citizen. Those individuals were identified as Ambroise, Venette, Jn Augustine, Ambroise and two unaccompanied minors from Haiti who did not have permission to enter the United States.

If convicted of bringing aliens into the United States, Williams faces a sentence up to ten years and a \$250,000 fine. If convicted of illegal entry, Ambroise, Venette, Jn Augustine and Ambroise face a maximum sentence of six months and a \$5,000 fine.

The case is being investigated Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine Unit and prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Sigrid M. Tejo-Sprotte.

United States Attorney Shappert reminds the public that an indictment is merely a formal charging document and is not evidence of guilt. Every defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.