

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## 11 Venezuelans Arrested Following Apprehension Aboard Vessel Near St. Croix and Seizure of 55 Kilograms of Cocaine

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Staff **October 07, 2019**



U.S. Attorney Gretchen C.F. Shappert announced today that 11 men claiming to be Venezuelan nationals: Vicent Mata Anyelo, Alfer Rodriguez Boadas, Alexis Fuentes, Francisco Rodriguez Infante, Johan Garcia Suarez, Carlos Rodriguez Garcia, Henry Gonzalez Noriega, Algler Rodriguez Boadas, Jhonny Rodriguez Rodriguez, Daniel Jesus Salazar Gonzalez and Johan Jose Pacheco Lezama appeared before Magistrate Judge George W. Cannon for an initial appearance after arrests by Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Special Agents on the charges of possession of a controlled substance on board a vessel subject to the jurisdiction of the United States, conspiracy to

possess a controlled substance on board a vessel subject to the jurisdiction of the United States, and destruction and attempt or conspire to destroy property subject to forfeiture.

According to court documents, on the evening of September 25, the United States Coast Guard Cutter Donald Horsley intercepted a suspicious 55 foot vessel named La Gran Tormenta displaying Venezuelan nationality approximately 38 nautical miles south of St. Croix. The La Gran Tormenta did not reply to Donald Horsley's efforts to engage in questioning of the crew, and upon detection, La Gran Tormenta changed course and jettisoned packages. Coast Guard Cutter Donald Horsley was subsequently able to retrieve two bales from the water.

The two jettisoned bales contained packages with brick shaped objects, with an estimated weight of 55 kilograms in total. Presumptive tests on the packages yielded positive results for the presence of cocaine. After requesting and receiving the permission from the flag state to stop the vessel, United States Coast Guard personnel attempted a right of visit boarding, which was ineffective because crew on the La Gran Tormenta disregarded the Coast Guard personnel's instructions. Eventually Coast Guard personnel obtained control of the La Gran Tormenta through use of an "entanglement tactic" which stopped the vessel's engine. A USCG counter-drug boarding team encountered 11 persons, later identified as the above- listed suspects.

The men face up to life imprisonment for the offense and a fine of up to \$10,000,000. Detention and preliminary hearings in this case have been scheduled for Thursday at 9:00 a.m. in federal court.

The case was investigated by the U.S. Coast Guard, Customs and Border Protection, and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. It is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Melissa P. Ortiz.

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