

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Venezuelan Sentenced to 48 Months in Federal Prison For Conspiracy to Possess With Intent to Distribute Cocaine

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ST. CROIX — United States Attorney Delia L. Smith announced today that Daniel Jesus Salazar-Gonzalez, 43, one of eleven Venezuelan nationals apprehended at sea off the coast of St. Croix, was sentenced today to 46 months imprisonment followed by two years of supervised release by District Judge Wilma Lewis, on the charge of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute cocaine while on board a vessel subject to the jurisdiction of the United States.

According to court documents, on September 25, 2019, the United States Coast Guard Cutter Donald Horsley intercepted the “La Gran Tormenta”, a suspicious 55- foot vessel displaying Venezuelan nationality, approximately 38 nautical miles south of St. Croix.

The occupants of the vessel failed to respond to the Coast Guard's efforts to engage in questioning, and thereafter changed course and began jettisoning packages. Coast Guard crew members later detained 11 individuals onboard the vessel and retrieved two bales from the ocean which contained packages of brick-shaped objects that tested positive for cocaine hydrochloride and weighed approximately 49 kilograms.

The case was investigated by the United States Coast Guard, Drug Enforcement Administration and Customs and Border Protection. It is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Melissa P. Ortiz. This prosecution is part of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) investigation.

OCDETF identifies, disrupts, and dismantles the highest-level drug traffickers, money launderers, gangs, and transnational criminal organizations that threaten the United States by using a prosecutor-led, intelligence-driven, multi-agency approach that leverages the strengths of federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies against criminal networks.