

The Virgin Islands Consortium

69-Year-Old Costa Rican Pleads Guilty to Marijuana Transport Conspiracy

Crime / **Published On June 18, 2023 09:25 AM /**

Staff Consortium **June 18, 2023**



ST. CROIX — A Costa Rican man has pleaded guilty to charges related to the transportation of approximately 4,000 pounds of marijuana aboard a vessel under U.S. jurisdiction, the U.S. Attorney's Office announced recently.

Luis Antonio Orellana-Orellano, 69, appeared in front of U.S. District Court Magistrate Judge Emile A. Henderson III in St. Croix, on June 13, where he entered his plea.

Orellana-Orellano's sentencing is slated for October 21, 2023, with the potential punishment of up to 20 years of imprisonment. The exact sentencing will be determined by a federal district court judge, who will weigh the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other

statutory considerations in their decision.

The case originated from a U.S. Coast Guard patrol operation on November 7, 2022, in the Eastern Pacific international waters, 65 nautical miles south of Boca Chica, Panama. The USCGC Campbell spotted a go-fast vessel during the operation. A smaller, Over the Horizon (OTH) vessel was deployed and found three occupants aboard the suspicious vessel, one of whom was Orellana-Orellano.

Contraband was visibly present on the deck of the vessel, named "Agamenon." No registration documents or physical flag were displayed, with only a registration number painted on the hull. The master of the vessel claimed Colombian nationality; however, the Republic of Colombia could neither confirm nor deny this claim. This led to the vessel being treated as one without nationality, thereby falling under U.S. jurisdiction.

A thorough search of the half-sunken vessel and the surrounding water resulted in the seizure of 57 bales of suspected marijuana, weighing a total of 4,104 pounds.

The two other occupants of the vessel, Keyran Coto Lopez and Alonso Hernandez-Hernandez, are scheduled to make initial appearances in U.S. District Court on June 21, 2023. They face charges of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute 50 kilograms or more of marijuana and possession of a controlled substance with the intent to distribute, both while on board a vessel subject to U.S. jurisdiction. If convicted, each man could serve a maximum of 20 years imprisonment.

This case is the result of a joint investigation by the U.S. Coast Guard and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). Assistant U.S. Attorney Melissa P. Ortiz is leading the prosecution. The investigation is part of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces' (OCDETF) initiative. The OCDETF aims to identify, disrupt, and dismantle high-level drug traffickers, money launderers, gangs, and transnational criminal organizations that threaten the United States.

U.S. Attorney Delia L. Smith reminded the public that all defendants, including Coto Lopez and Hernandez-Hernandez, are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.