

The Virgin Islands Consortium

CBP Announces Escalating Crisis of Illegal Immigration in Puerto Rico and USVI; 16 Arrested in Northern Puerto Rico

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Ernice Gilbert **August 02, 2023**



The U.S. Customs and Border Protection on Wednesday warned about a dangerous increase in the number of migrants attempting to enter the U.S. illegally by sea, after the recent arrest of 16 undocumented migrants in northern Puerto Rico.

Ramey Sector Border Patrol Agents apprehended the group on Monday after they disembarked from a makeshift wooden vessel near a shopping mall in Hatillo, Puerto Rico. CBP said the Ramey Station received a report about the possible migrant smuggling incident near Plaza del Norte mall in Hatillo, prompting immediate action.

A team comprised of Border Patrol agents, personnel from Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), Hatillo Municipal Police, and Puerto Rico Police Department Officers quickly arrived at the scene. They found an abandoned 30-foot, blue fiberglass vessel with two outboard engines beached on the shore behind the mall area.

Desi DeLeon, Chief Patrol Agent for the Ramey Sector, issued a stern warning to anyone contemplating an illegal crossing of the Mona Passage into the United States. He stated, "People who venture to cross the sea, boarding a rustic and inadequate boat, endanger not only their lives, but also the lives of law enforcement officials from both countries with the mission of rescuing them."

After a comprehensive search operation, agents found 16 undocumented migrants, including 12 adult males from the Dominican Republic, two adult males, and one adult female from Haiti, and one adult female from the Dominican Republic. A Haitian female, who was suffering from dehydration, was immediately transported to Camuy Health Services for medical evaluation.

In the current federal fiscal year alone, Ramey Sector Border Patrol agents have apprehended 1,329 non-citizens attempting or successfully entering the U.S. illegally through Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Illegal entry or attempted entry into the U.S., without seeking admission at a designated port of entry as per Title 8, is a crime that may severely hamper an immigrant's prospects of legally remaining in the country.

The apprehended group was transported to the Ramey Station to commence removal proceedings.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime states that the smuggling of migrants by sea results in the largest number of deaths worldwide. Factors contributing to these fatalities include lack of food, dehydration, drownings, beatings, and even murders by smugglers who have reportedly thrown people overboard. Instances of suicides have also been documented.