Coast Guard Interdicts, Repatriates Migrants to Dominican Republic

The crew of a cutter boat from the Richard Dixon arrives on-scene June 29 to intercept a vessel with 45 migrants onboard in the Mona Passage off the west coast of Puerto Rico. The migrants were repatriated to the Dominican navy. U.S. Coast Guard

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – The U.S. Coast Guard repatriated 86 of 87 migrants to the Dominican Republic navy between June 30 and July 1 following the interdiction of three illegal migrant voyages in the Mona Passage off the west coast of Puerto Rico, the Coast Guard's 7th District reported.

The 87 interdicted migrants were Dominican nationals. One remains hospitalized in Puerto Rico after he was medically evacuated due to an existing medical condition.

The interdictions are the result of ongoing efforts in support of Operation Caribbean Guard and the Caribbean Border Interagency Group CBIG.

"The strong collaboration between the Coast Guard and our Caribbean Border Interagency Group partner agencies involved in this case, as well as, with our allies in the Dominican Republic navy, led to the interdiction of three migrant vessels and ensured the quick and safe return of 86 migrants," said Capt. Gregory Magee, commander of Coast Guard Sector San Juan.

"This same effort allowed for one of the migrants in need of urgent medical care to be transported to a local hospital in Puerto Rico. We are committed to safeguarding our nation's southernmost maritime border against existing threats and call

for anyone thinking of taking part in an illegal voyage to not take to the sea, you are placing your life at great risk as well as the life of everyone else taking part in the voyage."

The first illegal voyage was detected June 29 by the crew of a patrolling Air Station Borinquen MH-65 Dolphin helicopter, about 40 nautical miles off Aguadilla. The Coast Guard Cutters Richard Dixon and Heriberto Hernandez diverted to the scene. Richard Dixon arrived on-scene and stopped the 30-foot migrant vessel that was transporting 39 men and six women. The Richard Dixon escorted the migrant vessel back to Dominican territorial waters, where they met with the Dominican navy vessel Bellatrix and completed the repatriation.

The second illegal voyage was detected the evening of June 29 by the crew of a Customs and Border Protection Marine Enforcement Aircraft, about 22 nautical miles off the southwest coast of Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico. The Heriberto Hernandez diverted to the scene, while a marine unit from Customs and Border Protection Caribbean Air and Marine also responded to interdict.

The CBP marine unit stopped the 35-foot vessel that was transporting 31 men and eight women, while the Heriberto Hernandez arrived on scene shortly thereafter and embarked the migrants.

One of the migrants in this case was medically evacuated to a local hospital in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico, while the remaining migrants were transported by the Heriberto Hernandez to Dominican territorial waters, where they met and completed the at-sea repatriation to a Dominican Navy vessel just off Santo Domingo.

The third illegal voyage was detected the morning of July 1 by the crew of a Customs and Border Protection Dash-8 maritime patrol aircraft, about 12 nautical miles west of Aguadilla.

The crew of a responding Puerto Rico Police Joint Forces of Rapid Action marine unit interdicted the 21-foot makeshift vessel that was transporting three men.

Shortly thereafter, the Heriberto Hernandez arrived on scene, embarked the migrants and transported them to waters just of Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, where the repatriation was completed to a Dominican navy vessel that afternoon.

Once aboard a cutter, all migrants receive food, water, shelter and basic medical attention. Throughout the interdiction Coast Guard crew members were equipped with personal protective equipment to minimize potential exposure to any possible case of COVID-19. No migrants were reported to have any COVID-19 related symptoms.

Heriberto Hernandez and Richard Dixon are 154-foot fast-response cutters homeported in San Juan.