# Coast Guard Repatriates 18 Migrants to the Dominican Republic

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Heriberto Hernandez (WPC-1114) repatriated 18 migrants to a Dominican Republic Navy vessel just off the Dominican Republic Sept.11 following the interdiction of two illegal migrant voyages Sept. 8 in the Mona Passage.

Four men, among the interdicted migrants, remain in Puerto Rico to face possible federal prosecution on charges of violating 8 USC 1326, which carries a potential maximum term of imprisonment of 20 years and a fine of up to $250,000.

The interdictions were a result of ongoing efforts in support of Operation Unified Resolve, Operation Caribbean Guard and the Caribbean Border Interagency Group (CBIG). Since October 2018, the Coast Guard and CBIG federal and state partner agencies have interdicted over 2,026 migrants at sea near Puerto Rico.

“Migrants risk their lives when they attempt to cross the Mona Passage aboard makeshift vessels with little or no lifesaving equipment,” said Capt. Eric King, Commander of Coast Guard Sector San Juan. “What many of them do not realize is that they potentially risk going to prison when they attempt to enter the country illegally.”

“The seas around Puerto are unpredictable and unforgiving,” said Lt. Andrew Russo, commanding officer of the cutter Heriberto Hernandez. “These two cases highlight the inherent and explicit danger each illegal venture poses.  I am proud of my crew and thankful for the support from our partner agencies as we work to ensure the safety of all lives at sea.”

While on patrol in the Mona Passage Sept. 8, the crew of a Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Air and Marine Operations DHC-8 marine patrol aircraft crew sighted a migrant boat just off Mona Island, Puerto Rico. Cutter Heriberto Hernandez diverted to the scene and interdicted the 18-foot boat with 13 migrants aboard. The cutter crew safely embarked 12 men and a woman, who claimed Dominican Republic nationality.

In a separate case shortly thereafter, two Puerto Rico Police Joint Forces of Rapid Action marine units interdicted a second 18-foot migrant boat Sept.8Sunday night just off the coast of Aguadilla, Puerto Rico. Coast Guard watchstanders at Sector San Juan diverted cutter Heriberto Hernandez to the scene, where the crew safely embarked seven men and two women, who claimed Dominican Republic nationality.

Ramey Sector Border Patrol agents in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico received custody of the four migrants awaiting federal prosecution.

Once aboard a Coast Guard cutter, all migrants receive food, water, shelter and basic medical attention.