

Coast Guard Repatriates 20 Migrants to the Dominican Republic



The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Heriberto Hernandez (WPC-1114) cutter boat helps transfer 20 migrants, who claimed to be Dominican Republic nationals, to the Coast Guard Cutter Vigilant (WMEC-617) during a rendezvous in the Mona Passage Sept. 27, 2020. U.S. COAST GUARD

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – The Coast Guard Cutter Vigilant (WMEC-617) repatriated 20 migrants to the Dominican Republic between Sept. 27 and Sept. 29, following the interdiction of an illegal migrant voyage in the Mona Passage just off Rincon, Puerto Rico, the Coast Guard 7th District said in a Sept. 29 release.

The interdiction is the result of ongoing multiagency efforts in support of Operation Caribbean Guard and the Caribbean Border Interagency Group CBIG.

“The crew of the Heriberto Hernandez is glad to help save all 20 lives from this grossly overloaded makeshift vessel,” said Lt. Andrew Russo, Coast Guard Cutter Heriberto Hernandez (WPC-1114) commanding officer. “Unfortunately like in most cases, the conditions these migrants faced placed their lives in great danger. These makeshift vessels are unstable; they are unseaworthy and continuously take on water. Throughout the voyage, the migrants are exposed to the elements and leaking fuel, and they rarely have any serviceable lifesaving equipment onboard.”

Coast Guard watchstanders at Sector San Juan received a communication late Saturday night from a Ramey Border Patrol Sector agent, who informed a Puerto Rico Police Joint Forces of Rapid Action marine unit was on scene with an illegal

voyage, approximately five nautical miles southwest of Rincon, Puerto Rico. Coast Guard watchstanders diverted the Coast Guard Cutter Heriberto Hernandez to the scene.

Once on scene with the interdicted 20-foot makeshift boat, the crew of cutter Heriberto Hernandez safely embarked the migrants for safety of life at sea concerns. The migrant vessel was transporting 16 adult men and two women, as well as two male unaccompanied minors, who claimed to be Dominican Republic nationals.

Once aboard a Coast Guard cutter, all migrants received food, water, shelter and basic medical attention. Throughout the interdiction, Coast Guard crewmembers were equipped with personal protective equipment to minimize potential exposure to any possible case of COVID-19. There were no migrants in these cases reported to have any COVID-19 related symptoms.

Cutter Heriberto Hernandez later transferred the migrants to the cutter Vigilant, which in turn completed the repatriation of the migrants. Eighteen of the migrants were repatriated at sea, where they were transferred to a Dominican Republic navy vessel Sunday, while the remaining two were repatriated and transferred to local authorities in Santo Domingo Tuesday morning.

Cutters Heriberto Hernandez is a 154-foot fast-response cutter homeported in San Juan, Puerto Rico, while the cutter Vigilant is a 210-foot medium-endurance cutter homeported in Port Canaveral, Florida.