Coast Guard Repatriates 41 Migrants to the Dominican Republic

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – The Coast Guard repatriated 15 migrants Dec. 21 and 26 others Dec. 20 to the Dominican Republic, following the interdiction of four migrant vessels in Mona Passage waters off the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, the 7th Coast Guard District said in a release.

The interdictions were a result of ongoing efforts in support of Operation Unified Resolve, Operation Caribbean Guard and the Caribbean Border Interagency Group (CBIG).

“Crossing the perilous waters of the Mona Passage aboard grossly overloaded makeshift boats with no life-saving equipment onboard is extremely dangerous and a potentially life-threatening situation,” said Cmdr. Christopher Douglas, Coast Guard Sector San Juan chief of response. “The excellent interagency collaboration between the responding local and federal agencies led to the successful interdiction of all four migrant vessels and the safe recovery of 41 migrants.”

“Ramey Border Patrol Sector has adjusted its presence in key locations around Puerto Rico, in response to the increased activity in our area,” said Xavier Morales, Ramey Sector chief patrol agent in Aguadilla. “It is usual to see an increase in smuggling activities during the holiday season. Smugglers have the perception that law enforcement decreases during this period, however our agents remain vigilant, working 24 hours, seven days a week.”

The crew of a Customs and Border Protection (CBP) DHC-8 maritime patrol aircraft detected the first migrant vessel Dec. 17 transiting without navigational lights, approximately 11 nautical miles north of Aguadilla, Puerto Rico. Coast Guard

watchstanders in Sector San Juan diverted the Cutter Joseph Tezanos, while a CBP Caribbean Air and Marine and a Puerto Rico Police Joint Forces of Rapid Action marine unit also responded to interdict the suspect vessel.

The crew of the CBP marine unit arrived on scene and interdicted the 30-foot makeshift boat with eight migrants onboard, six men and two women, who claimed Dominican nationality. Joseph Tezanos arrived on scene soon thereafter, embarked the migrants and later transferred them to the Cutter Joseph Napier. Joseph Napier transported the migrants to La Romana, Dominican Republic, where they were repatriated and transferred to Dominican Republic Navy authorities Dec. 20.

Joseph Napier interdicted a second migrant vessel Dec. 20, after the crew of a patrolling CBP DHC-8 detected a 25-foot boat transiting toward Puerto Rico, approximately 15 nautical miles east southeast of Isla Saona, Dominican Republic. The crew embarked 18 migrant adults from the makeshift boat, 16 men and 2 women, who claimed Dominican nationality. Joseph Napier rendezvoused with a Dominican Navy patrol vessel on Dec. 20 in waters south of Santo Domingo, where the crew embarked and received custody of the migrants.

Ramey Sector U.S. Border Patrol agents detected a third and fourth migrant vessel early Dec.20, approximately eight nautical miles north of Desecheo Island, Puerto Rico. Coast Guard watchstanders in Sector San Juan diverted the Cutter Winslow Griesser, which responded along with two Puerto Rico Police Joint Forces of Rapid Action marine units to interdict the suspect

vessels. A patrolling CBP Caribbean Air and Marine DHC-8 vectored-in the police units that closed-in and stopped both migrant vessels.

One of the interdicted vessels was carrying seven men, while the other was carrying eight, who claimed Dominican

nationality. Winslow Griesser arrived on scene shortly thereafter and safely embarked the migrants from both vessels. The cutter rendezvoused with a Dominican Navy patrol vessel Dec. 21 in waters just off Samana, Dominican Republic, where the crew embarked and received custody of the migrants.

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

Winslow Griesser, Joseph Napier and Joseph Tezanos are 154-foot fast response cutters homeported in San Juan.