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**COLOMBIAN NATIONAL WHO HAD FAKED INJURY TO AVOID ARREST
PLEADS GUILTY TO SECOND DRUG TRAFFICKING OFFENSE**

Tampa, Florida - United States Attorney Robert E. O'Neill announces that Ferney Quinones De La Cruz (34, Colombia) today pleaded guilty to conspiring with others to possess with intent to distribute five kilograms or more of cocaine, while on board a vessel subject to the jurisdiction of the United States. Because this is Quinones De La Cruz's second felony drug offense, he faces a mandatory minimum term of twenty years in federal prison, and a maximum term of life imprisonment.

According to the plea agreement, on April 19, 2009, United States Coast Guard Cutter (USCGC) MIDGETT interdicted the defendant aboard a stateless go-fast vessel (GFV) in international waters, approximately twenty-five nautical miles from Cabo Corrientes, Colombia. Upon first locating the GFV, Coast Guard personnel embarked in USCGC MIDGETT's helicopter signaled for the GFV to stop. The defendant and his co-conspirators ignored these signals. Consequently, a marksman embarked in the Coast Guard helicopter fired warning shots across the bow of the GFV, which were also ignored by the defendant and his co-conspirators. The marksman then fired disabling fire into one of the GFV's engines. One of the co-conspirators then sat on another of the GFV's engines, in an attempt to shield it from fire.

The helicopter returned to USCGC MIDGETT for fuel and, after re-fueling, reacquired the GFV. The marksman then shot out the second engine. A U.S. Customs and Border Protection aircraft was overhead during the entire pursuit and made a video recording of the defendants jettisoning bales. The GFV stopped and the mariners began dousing it with gasoline. A Coast Guard boarding team arrived on-scene before the defendants were able to set fire to the GFV.

Upon boarding the GFV, Coast Guard personnel found that it had no registration document, was flying no flag, displayed no home or hailing port, and had no indicia of nationality. The captain of the GFV claimed Colombian nationality for the GFV, a claim the Government of Colombia could neither confirm nor deny. Accordingly, the Eleventh Coast Guard District assimilated the vessel to a vessel without nationality status.

Cooperating witnesses subsequently informed the government that the GFV had been loaded with approximately 1,000 kilograms of cocaine.

Quinones De La Cruz was transferred to USCGC MIDGETT, where he pretended to be injured. Out of an abundance of caution, the Coast Guard medically evacuated the him to Colombia. Quinones De La Cruz was subsequently arrested in Colombia pursuant to a provisional arrest warrant, and extradited to the United States, first arriving at a place in the Middle District of Florida.

Quinones De La Cruz has a prior felony drug conviction in the United States, which results in the minimum mandatory term of twenty years' imprisonment. Specifically, on September 17, 2004, Quinones De La Cruz was convicted of conspiring with others to possess with intent to distribute five kilograms or more of cocaine, while on board a vessel subject to the jurisdiction of the United States, and possessing with intent to distribute five

kilograms of cocaine, while on board a vessel subject to the jurisdiction of the United States, both counts in violation of the Maritime Drug Law Enforcement Act, in the United States District Court for the Middle District of Florida, Tampa Division, in case no. 8:03-cr-048-T-27MSS. He pled guilty to these offenses on about July 23, 2003. In this prior case, Quinones De La Cruz was a mariner embarked in a GFV smuggling more than 1,000 kilograms of cocaine, in international waters.

This case was investigated by the Panama Express Strike Force (South), comprised of agents and analysts from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Administration, U.S. Immigration and Customs and Enforcement, Coast Guard Investigative Service, and U.S. Southern Command's Joint Interagency Task Force South. It is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Christopher F. Murray.