



U.S. Department of Justice

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Monday, January 23, 2012

### **2 PUERTO RICAN NATIVES PLEAD GUILTY TO DRUG TRAFFICKING**

**St. Thomas, USVI** - Gilsom Rodriguez-Avillan, 30, and Jorge Canales-Ramos, 34, pleaded guilty Friday in District Court on St. Thomas to two counts of an indictment charging them with drug trafficking, announced United States Attorney Ronald W. Sharpe and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Homeland Security Investigations Resident Agent-in-Charge Hillary Hodge.

Both men pleaded guilty to conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute cocaine and possession with intent to distribute cocaine. They were indicted on October 6, 2011.

According to documents filed in court, on September 2, 2011, Customs and Border Protection Marine Patrol agents saw Rodriguez-Avillan and Canales-Ramos onboard a 30-foot Yola northwest of St. Thomas. As the agents approached the vessel, the defendants threw two duffle bags from the vessel and attempted to escape. The agents apprehended the two Puerto Rican natives, and recovered the duffle bags from the surrounding waters. The bags contained approximately 46 bricks of cocaine weighing approximately 48 kilograms.

During the plea hearing, both men admitted that between June 2011 and September 2011, they conspired to and did distribute approximately 300 kilograms of cocaine by transporting the cocaine by boat from Xanadu Beach on St. Thomas to Fajardo, Puerto Rico.

Rodriquez-Avillan and Canales-Ramos each face a statutory minimum penalty of 10 years in prison. Their sentencing is scheduled for April 26, 2012.

The case was investigated by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Homeland Security Investigations and the Drug Enforcement Administration. It is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Delia L. Smith.