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PORT ST. LUCIE, Fla. (CBS12) -- A federal jury convicted a Port St. Lucie man on conspiracy to export United States defense articles and attempted smuggling of defense articles.

The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) said Gabriel Donato-Mendez's conviction on November 20 stems from his purchase of over 150 AR-15 kits between 2018 and 2019, which he intended to export to Costa Rica without the necessary licenses.

According to court documents, on March 4, 2019, Donato-Mendez transported at least 84 of the AR-15 kits from a store in Daytona to a freight forwarder for export. At the time, AR-15s and their components were classified as "defense articles" on the United States Munitions List, requiring a license from the Department of State's Directorate of Defense Trade Controls for export. Neither Donato-Mendez nor his known conspirators possessed such a license.

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Donato-Mendez is scheduled to be sentenced on February 7, 2025, in Miami. He faces up to 10 years in prison for the attempted smuggling charge and five years for the conspiracy charge.

The investigation was conducted by HSI Miami, HSI Fort Pierce, and ATF Fort Pierce, with assistance from the Costa Rican Organismo de Investigaci?n Judicial and the U.S. Department of State Directorate of Defense Trade Controls.

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PORT ST. LUCIE, Fla. -- A Port St. Lucie man faces a lengthy prison sentence after he was convicted of attempting to smuggle items used to assemble AR-15 firearms, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.

Authorities said in a written statement Friday that a federal jury on Nov. 20 convicted Gabriel Donato-Mendez, 48, of conspiracy to export United States defense articles and of attempted smuggling of defense articles.

According to the DOJ, over a six-month span in 2018 and 2019, Donato-Mendez bought more than 150 AR-15 "kits" which consisted of the pieces required to make AR-15 firearms after minor drilling and assembly.



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On March 4, 2019, prosecutors said Donato-Mendez brought at least 84 AR-15 kits from a store in Daytona Beach, Florida, to a freight forwarder where the kits were destined to be exported to Costa Rica.

In 2019, AR-15s and their parts were on the United States Munitions List as "defense articles" and required a license from the Department of State's Directorate of Defense Trade Controls to be exported.

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Web: <https://www.kary.com.pl/contact-us/>

Email: energystorage2000@gmail.com

WhatsApp: 8613816583346

