

Search for missing Haitians scaled back

The Miami Herald
May. 06, 2007

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico --

Police in the Turks and Caicos scaled back their search for more than 40 missing Haitian migrants on Sunday, assigning a single vessel to scan the Caribbean waters where the crowded sailboat capsized two days earlier.

Searchers found no bodies or survivors over the weekend, dimming hopes for the rescue effort.

"We haven't called the search off completely as yet," police Inspector Hilton Duncan said. "Our police vessel is still out there."

Roughly 160 Haitian migrants were aboard the boat when it ran into stormy weather before dawn Friday off the coast of the Turks and Caicos Islands, about 125 miles north of Haiti. Thirty six people were confirmed dead in addition to the more than 40 missing in shark-infested waters.

Three investigators from the United Kingdom arrived Saturday in the British territory to lead an investigation into the accident, Duncan said. The islands are largely self-governing but defer to Britain in issues of defense, security and foreign affairs.

A survivor said the 25-foot Haitian sloop overturned after passengers panicked during the storm and shifted to one side, but the U.S. Coast Guard said its initial account from police said the intercepted vessel capsized as it was being towed to shore.

The search has involved several boats and helicopters belonging to the Turks and Caicos, but the U.S. Coast Guard ended its involvement after local authorities said it was no longer needed.