**GOODWILL MESSAGE BY THE CHIEF OF NAVAL STAFF VICE ADMIRAL IBOK-ETE EKWE IBAS ON THE OCCASSION OF THE 2016 HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT BI-ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY IN NIGERIA**

1. I am delighted to identify with you today on this auspicious occasion of the 2016 Health and Environment Bi-Annual International Conference on the Oil and Gas Industry (OGI) in Nigeria. As we are all aware, the vast potential of the OGI for enhancing Nigeria’ development is constantly undermined by multifaceted, domestic and cross-border threats. These threats constrain investment and economic development with potential adverse political consequences. Major threats such as attacks on shipping and strategic oil installations have become predominant with negative consequences on the economy, the environment and overall well-being of Nigeria and the wider Gulf of Guinea. In this regard, the theme of this conference which is ‘Integrated Security Approach, New Strategies and the Way to go in the Nigerian Oil & Gas Industry’ is considered apt. This is judging from the increasing need to evolving collective approach to security to address the fluid nature of threats to maritime economy of Nigeria and neighbouring states, particularly those with oil and gas assets.

2. I am pleased to inform you that the Nigerian Navy (NN), nad indeed the Armed Forces of Nigeria, have remain seized with the imperative of evolving a credible and collective approach towards protecting the OGI and associated shipping activities. For instance, in response to the recent spate of attacks to OGI in the Niger Delta, the NN reviewed its operational concept with the activation of a choke point management and control operation as well as a dedicated anti-piracy Operation TSARE TEKU to check the menace of sabotage, criminalities and illegalities in Nigeria’s waters. Likewise, the recent re-organisation of the joint Operation PULO SHIELD into Operation DELTA SAFE, with the NN tasked to play the lead agency role, was aimed at improving the efficiency of the collective effort by the participating security agencies. In Lagos Area, deployments to oil and gas installations were also increased under the joint Operation AWATSE. The NN also embarked on series of consultation with maritime stakeholders.

3. Specifically, the Choke Point Management and Control Regime involves deployment of armed personnel in houseboats positioned in strategic locations within the creeks and supported by NN patrol boats. Since the introduction of the Choke Point Control Regime, drastic reduction has been recorded in traffic of barges and other vessels used for conveying stolen crude oil and illegally refined products. Similarly, since the activation of OP TSARE TEKU in April 2016, there has been a continuous presence of patrol vessels at sea with attendant reduction in cases of successful attacks on shipping. In the same vein, Operation AWATSE, a collective effort by the Armed Forces, was launched in October 2014 to curb pipeline vandalism and illegal dealings in petroleum products in the Ikorodu area of Lagos State. Its mandate is to protect and secure NNPC pipeline from Atlas Cove Terminal to Mosimi Depot, covering over 72Km. I am pleased to inform you that the effort has largely reduced incidences of pipeline vandalism and oil theft in the area. The NN also collaborates with private maritime security support companies to extend dedicated coverage to offshore oil and gas installations. The cooperative efforts have drastically improved the security of oil and gas installations in Nigeria’s maritime environment.

4. As part of the measures to ensure shared vision and accomplishment on maritime security, the NN holds regular meetings with major maritime stakeholders for the purpose of information sharing and coordination of maritime security operations. This is in recognition of the centrality of intelligence and information sharing to successful maritime security operations. Suffice to state that the frequent consultations have deepened the understanding of stakeholders on the emerging security situation.

5. On the international scene, there is a proactive measure towards addressing the threats. For instance, in July 2013, the Code of Conduct for the Repression of Piracy and Illicit Activities at Sea was adopted by Heads of Government of ECOWAS and ECCAS. Similarly, as part of the integrated effort on maritime security, the ECOWAS heads of government in 2014 established the Maritime Security Zones E, F and G with Nigeria belonging to Zone E. Consequently, Nigeria, Niger, Benin and Togo consummated a multilateral agreement for the establishment of the ECOWAS Pilot Zone E for maritime security with Coordination Centre in Cotonou. The Zone E mechanism was activated in March 2015. In order to give effect to the grand strategic direction provided by ECOWAS and ECCAS, regional navies would need to enhance existing cooperation on maritime security operations. The cooperation would facilitate implementation of agreed protocols and promote patrols in the GoG for enhanced maritime security. This will no doubt boost investments and enhance economic development which translates to improving the well-being of the people.

6. As you proceed with the Conference, I implore all participants to make useful contributions, taking cognisance of the peculiar security requirements of the nation’s maritime domain. I also urge you to key into the collective and integrated approaches to maritime security both at the national and regional levels through information sharing and support to the joint operations as well as the zonal and regional mechanisms. On its part, the NN remains committed to ensuring a secure maritime domain that will promote activities in the oil and gas industry. On this note, I thank you for inviting me and wish you fruitful deliberations.