**TEXT OF WELCOME ADDRESS BY DIRECTOR GENERAL, NATIONAL BROADCASTING COMMISSION (NBC), IS’HAQ MODIBBO KAWU, AT THE BROADCAST STAKEHOLDERS’ MEETING, LADI KWALI HALL, SHERATON HOTEL, ABUJA ON WEDNESDAY, 22ND FEBRUARY, 2017**

**PROTOCOLS:**

I feel very honoured to welcome the distinguished cast of Nigerians present here: a cast that is directly related to the past, present and future of Nigerian broadcasting. For me, my professional life commenced forty years ago this month in February 1977, when I was first employed by the defunct Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation; and that happened in the context of the exciting years of Nigerian broadcasting which cultured us and gave us the tremendous opportunity to learn from some of the great men and women of our profession. If we see farther today, ladies and gentlemen, it is simply because we are standing on the shoulders of the giants of our profession.

President Muhammadu Buhari appointed me Director General of the National Broadcasting Commission(NBC) on May 25th, 2016. Since then, I have always hoped for a meeting like this, which would give us the opportunity to explore the main issues that affect the industry today, and condition the professional endeavours of broadcasting during these exciting yet challenging moments in our country’s development. The decisions that we would take in this gathering must therefore reflect the realities of the times as well as assist to navigate the challenges which face us as a collective.

The most important issue that we have resolutely faced since I assumed office is the Digital Switchover (DSO). I am sure that you are all aware that in April 2016 we commenced the pilot phase of the switchover in Jos, Plateau state. Eight months later, on December 22nd, 2016, we began the real Switchover here in Abuja. The Abuja phase will be the beginning of Analogue Switch Off (ASO) in our country. It is indicative of the general interest that DSO has generated in Nigeria, that last Thursday, the House of Representatives held a Public Hearing on the process, while the Senate also followed suit just yesterday. There is indeed a lot of excitement about the process as well as apprehension, about the completion of the national switchover within the stipulated time. We missed two deadlines to complete the switchover in 2012 and 2015, but we have the assurances of President Muhammadu Buhari and his government, to ensure that we complete the switchover this time around. On our parts at the NBC, I want to assure that we are also totally committed to midwifing the process; even when we recognize that it is a major financial; technical and logistics challenge for all of us in the Commission; in the industry and for all Nigerians!

Let me add that the successes that we have recorded so far, have been as a result of the collective effort of all of us: Signal Distributors; Set Top Manufacturers; the various channels owners; our partners in CCNL; Inview Technology; call centre operators; Digiteam; and the NBC. Going forwards, we must continue to work together to deliver a complete DSO/ASO in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. What is unique about the process in our country, is that this is a process that is driven by Nigerians for Nigerians; and this is why our experience has become highly recognized all over the African continent.

But there are also issues arising from the experience we have gathered in the past one year of DSO that we are making the effort to resolve. These include the pertinent issue of cost of carriage of the content of broadcasters by our two signal distributors. We are in the process of collating submissions in order to arrive at the appropriate levels of tariffs and fees that would be reasonable as well economical on all sides. This issue is very critical, because at the moment, the Federal Government is bearing the transmission cost during this transitional phase; and these are very huge costs indeed! We are also carrying out the streamlining of functions of key players in the DSO process, with the intention of removing conflicting roles and duties as well as harmonizing the positions to achieve very seamless work. We will soon come out with Key Performance Indicators (KPI), which should address areas of interface as well as service delivery.

Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen; there are very worrisome issues in our operations. The first, is the situation whereby many stations have refused to pay their license fees; even the statutory act of informing the NBC, six months before the expiration of license and signifying intention to continue as a licensee is ignored. Our licensees carry on, as if they have their licenses for keeps and the NBC cannot withdraw licenses. It is important to remind us all that ALL licenses are PROVISIONAL, no matter how long you have held them. And for emphasis, I want to let you know that stations are owing over N5Billion as license fees. I will like to use this medium to inform you, that the NBC would be invoking the relevant laws against erring stations. Consequently, ALL stations without exception, are expected to complete all payments owed to the Commission by the 15th of March, 2017.

The Commission is equally disturbed by the illegal and rampant use of transmission power by stations all over Nigeria. Stations procure transmitters without respecting the stipulated and recommended transmitter power in city-based FM stations. The consequence of this is that we have frequency clashes occurring all over Nigeria. As of yesterday, we have compiled a total of 69 stations around Nigeria, that have installed transmitters BEYOND the transmitter power stipulated in their licenses, and that is not even exhaustive. A top Nigerian politician who was given a license, installed a 10KW transmitter; began transmission even BEFORE NBC gave him the permission, and when NBC Engineers went to inspect his facilities, he sent his thugs to chase away our workers! Let me make some points clear here: Henceforth no broadcaster would be allowed to import a transmitter beyond the power allotted in the licenses issued. Secondly, stations must ensure that their broadcasts are limited to assigned areas only; and where these areas require less than 2KW power, they must tune their transmitters BELOW 2KW. On a final note, ALL stations that have installed MORE than allotted TX power are hereby put on notice, that they have SIX MONTHS to procure and install 2KW transmitters. After the expiration of this grace period, we will ensure the DE-COMMISSIONING of the transmitters installed beyond the allotted TX power!

Other related technical issues include the refusal of some stations to install aviation warning lights on their masts. Each one of us here realizes that we endanger our collective safety with this terribly unprofessional attitude. All stations are hereby given till February 28th, 2017, to ensure that proper aviation warning lights are installed on their masts. We have also seen that there are stations that have refused to install OFF-AIR Recording facilities. We all know that this is also an imperative. NBC Monitoring Officers around Nigeria will check every station to ensure compliance. These must be in place latest by March 31st, 2017; thereafter, all stations that have not installed these recording facilities would be closed down!

I will like to draw your attention to the dangerous trend of Hate Speech that has become a major problem in our country today. Broadcasters are beginning to abdicate our gatekeeping role; there are too many stray dogs around the house now; our stations must not be arenas for inciting and hate speech that can endanger the good order of our country. Broadcasting must promote pluralism and decency, as well as help to deepen the content of Nigeria’s democracy. We must NOT divide Nigeria! If we have forgotten, radio became a medium that helped to trigger the tragic genocide in Rwanda. We must use broadcasting here as a platform of national development. At the NBC, we are collaborating with the Savanah Center for Diplomacy, Democracy and Development, to expose tendencies towards Hate Speech in the Nigerian media in general, and in the broadcasting industry in particular. We have also commissioned a leading Nigerian consultancy outfit to do a study on Hate Speech, the outcomes of which would be incorporated into our review of the Nigeria Broadcasting Code.

Finally, please permit me to inform you about the structure of this workshop; we would be constituted into a working group after this opening ceremony. I implore you all to please participate effectively in the discussions. Our hope is to build a broadcasting industry that is collaborative and inclusive of the different views of our colleagues. I want welcome you all once again to this gathering. Thank You very much for your attention!