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## JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE ON TRANSFER OF MT HEROIC IDUN FROM EQUATORIAL GUINEA TO NIGERIA AT NAVAL HEADQUARTERS ABUJA ON TUESDAY 15 NOVEMBER 2022

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### TEXT OF PRESS BRIEFING ON THE TRANSFER OF MT HEROIC IDUN FROM EQUATORIAL GUINEA TO NIGERIA

You may recall that on Friday 19 August 2022 the Naval Headquarters briefed the Press on the arrest of Motor Tanker HEROIC IDUN by the Equatorial Guinean Navy. It was mentioned that the Very Large Crude oil Carrier (VLCC) had entered the Nigerian Maritime Environment (NME) on 7 August 2022 and headed for Akpo Field without any form of authorisation or clearance. For the avoidance of doubt, MT HEROIC IDUN (IMO: 9858058) is registered in Marshall Island with an overall length of 336-metres, 60 metres breadth and capacity of 3 million barrels. The vessel was spotted by the Nigerian Navy Maritime Domain Awareness facility and a Nigerian Navy (NN) Inshore Patrol Craft, Nigerian Navy Ship (NNS) GONGOLA probed the legitimacy of her presence in the Total Safe Anchorage operated Akpo Field. Following the interrogation, the Captain of MT HEROIC IDUN duly responded to NNS GONGOLA and further stated that his vessel was without relevant clearance to operate in the Field.

The vessel was therefore ordered to turn around and follow NNS GONGOLA to Bonny anchorage pending when she will be cleared for loading by NNPC Ltd. However, she bluntly declined on the claims that she had been told by her agent not to take directives from the Nigerian Navy Ship. Thereafter, she engaged full speed southwards towards the Sao Tome and Principe maritime area in a bid to evade arrest. Apart from refusing lawful arrest, the Captain of the vessel made a broadcast of false piracy attack call to International Maritime Bureau (IMB) Piracy Reporting Centre to mislead mariners that NNS GONGOLA was a pirate vessel and possibly concoct an alibi for her desperate action. On the piracy alert, the Nigerian Navy also through international collaboration alerted relevant piracy reporting centres through CRESMAO and ECOWAS ZONE F Cotonou headed by Nigerian Navy officers for the alert to be cancelled immediately which was done by IMB. Suffice to state that Nigeria has not recorded any piracy attack in its waters in over one year. Hence, this mischievous act by MT HEROIC IDUN was clearly aimed at tarnishing the good image of the maritime domain of Nigeria, which we have worked very hard to achieve and sustain.

The Nigerian Navy therefore invoked the collaboration of neighbouring Equatorial Guinea through the Yaoundé Architecture to arrest the vessel. With the aid of the Nigerian Navy surveillance facility, MT HEROIC

IDUN was tracked and the Equatorial Guinea Amphibious Ship, CAPTAIN DAVID was therefore vectored to intercept and arrest the fleeing ship on 12 Aug 22. Pertinently, MT HEROIC IDUN was held at the Luba Anchorage in Bioko Island, Equatorial Guinea while the country conducted her own investigations owing to some infractions the vessel had also committed in the country's waters. Whilst these were ongoing, a formal request was made to transfer the vessel to Nigeria as mentioned during the Press Briefing on 19 August 2022. This was followed by diplomatic overtures and negotiations towards achieving the transfer of HEROIC IDUN to Nigeria. Suffice to add that both Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea are signatories to the Code of Conduct concerning the Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery against Ships and Illicit Maritime Activity in West and Central Africa of 2013 commonly referred to as the 'Yaounde Code of Conduct'. The Code is backed by appropriate UN Security Council Resolutions and provides the platform for information sharing as well as coordination amongst signatories. This includes handover of vessels or persons suspected to have committed offences in each other's States. It was based on this therefore that MT HEROIC IDUN was brought back to Nigeria from Equatorial Guinea on 12 November 2022.

The smear campaign put up by the ship in the Media space in a fierce attempt to rubbish the transfer process by falsely gaining international support/sympathy was thus bound to fail and perhaps an indication that the vessel has a case to answer. Accordingly, on 6 November 2022, the vessel was handed over to Nigeria by Equatorial Guinea. Subsequently, she cast off Equatorial Guinea waters under Nigerian Navy escort on 11 November and arrived off Bonny Offshore Terminal II on 12 November 2022. MT HEROIC IDUN is presently in the custody of the Nigerian Navy and based on legal opinion and analysis, the super-tanker could be said to have committed the following offences against the Nigerian State:

Attempt to deal in export crude oil without license or authorization.

Entering the Restricted Zone around an Oilfield without authorization and thus violating Nigeria's Exclusive Economic Zone regulations.

Falsely accusing a Nigerian Navy Ship of piracy on International Maritime Reporting Platforms after having communicated with the Nigerian Navy Ship without ambiguity about her identity therefore violating sections of the Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences (SPOMO) Act 2019.

Violation of all lawful instructions at sea from Maritime Law Authorities as well as Nigeria's Miscellaneous Act and other associated national and international laws ascribed to by Nigeria.

Violation of Custom and Immigration Laws as acceded by Nigeria regarding the operations of Akpo Oil Terminal being an Oil installation in the Nigerian Exclusive Economic Zone.

At this juncture, the NN wishes to enjoin the media, well-meaning Nigerians and well-wishers of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, to note the actual occurrence regarding MT HEROIC IDUN for which she is now under the custody of the Navy for prosecution. Please disregard rumours, mischievous and fictitious articles being circulated by enemies of the State, in a bid to cause chaos and discredit efforts of the Nigerian Navy and indeed Nigeria. The Navy also acknowledges with immense gratitude the role played by the Government of Equatorial Guinea in the arrest and transfer of MV HEROIC IDUN to Nigeria. Equally, the NN acknowledges the untiring efforts of the Federal ministries of Defence, Foreign Affairs and Justice in the actualization of the transfer of this Vessel of Interest.

The Navy assures Nigerians that in accordance with its statutory responsibilities and drawing strength from the strategic directives of the CNS, Vice Admiral Auwal Zubairu Gambo CFR, the Service will maintain a posture of zero tolerance to crude oil theft and other criminal activities in our maritime domain. The Navy shall continue to work in synergy with other maritime stakeholders, Gulf of Guinea states' navies and strategic partners to ensure that Nigeria derives maximum benefit from its natural maritime endowments.

Thank you for your attention.

**SS GARBA**

Rear Admiral

15 Nov 22

for Chief of the Naval Staff













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