Abuja, Nigeria, May 23 (Infosplusgabon) – The Nigerian Navy has taken into service a total of 12 Manta Class boats and inshore patrol craft to be inducted into its fleet this year.

In addition, the Navy said it has taken delivery of 148 river patrol boats, with another 24 expected later this year. I

Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Ibok-Ete Ibas said that 36 rigid inflatable boats were also procured, with another batch of 56 programmed for delivery in 2020 as part of the efforts to boost its operations.

Ibas, represented by Rear Admiral Ifeola Mohammed, Chief of Policy and Plans at Naval Headquarters, spoke to journalists on Friday in Abuja as part of the activities marking the Nigerian Navy's 64th anniversary from May 25 to June 1.

The Naval Chief said the Service had also invested in local content development through the local construction of Seaward Defence Boats (SDB).

Ibas said that the second locally built SDB, NNS KARADUWA, was inaugurated in 2016 while a third locally built SDB is programmed to join the Service this year.

In its renewed emphasis on fleet renewal, the Nigerian Navy also acquired three whaler boats that are also expected to join the fleet this year.

“Other acquisitions under this ambitious fleet renewal effort are the acquisition and deployment of 11 houseboats for the Choke Point Management and Control operations. One houseboat is also expected to be deployed in 2020. One tug boat has been inducted into the service, while 2 others are expected to join the fleet in 2020," Ibas said.

“Similarly, one water barge and one fuel barge are expected in 2020. The Nigerian Navy equally committed enormous resources to equipment availability to support its operations. Accordingly, the Nigerian Navy took delivery of a total of 168 outboard engines with requisite spares. As part of the Ministry of Defence’s critical intervention, the Nigerian Navy just took delivery of one Leonardo AW139 helicopter and is currently being inducted.”

Ibas noted that the Service instituted dedicated operations and initiatives to enhance its policing capability toward the peaceful use of the nation’s maritime environment.

But the reality is that, despite the acquisitions and deployment of Nigerian Navy vessels to patrol the nation’s waters, the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) says that the Gulf of Guinea remains the world’s piracy hot spot.

The Gulf of Guinea, in which the Nigerian Navy is the leading naval force, stretches from Gabon

to Liberia with the coastline including the Bights of Benin and Bight of Bonny.

IMB's 24-hour Piracy Reporting Centre (PRC) recorded 21 attacks in the Gulf of Guinea in the first quarter and 12 of the attacks were on vessels underway at an average of 70 nautical miles off the coast.

The body also stated that 10 vessels were fired on worldwide last year, four reported being fired at within Nigerian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the first quarter of 2020. The attack included the one on a container ship underway 130 nm southwest of Brass, Nigeria.

In 2013, Gulf of Guinea Heads of State and Government met in Yaounde, Cameroon and adopted the Yaoundé Declaration on the Gulf of Guinea Security, which led to the creation of the inter-regional Coordination Centre on Maritime Safety and Security for Central and West Africa, with headquarters in Yaoundé.

This led to the implementation of a new Code of Conduct Concerning the Prevention and Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery Against Ships and Illegal Maritime Activities in West and Central Africa.

It paved way for the creation and organisation of Gulf of Guinea Navies into maritime zones with Nigeria, Benin, Togo and Gendarmerie of the of Niger forming the ECOWAS Maritime Zone E.

But the Naval Chief noted that the acquisitions and its “initiatives have engendered several recorded successes in the operations of the bases. For instance, 2016 recorded the highest piracy attacks in the past five years.

Out of these, 51 were successful while 19 were unsuccessful. Also, in 2017, there were 48 piracy related cases, out of which 27 were successful while in 2018, there were 36 reported cases and only 9 successful.

“Furthermore, in 2019, 21 piracy related cases were reported and only seven of these attacks were successful. As at May 20, there were nine pirate attacks of which only two were successful and seven unsuccessful,” he said.

Ibas said a total of 449 suspected smugglers were arrested and their boats with products were handed over to the Nigeria Customs Service for further action.

In addition, he said that the Nigerian Navy, through its anti-crude oil theft operations has destroyed a total of 2,287 illegal refineries between 2015 to 2019.

Ibas noted that the Service had performed credibly well in the fight against crude oil and illegal oil bunkering through operations conducted by its ‘Operational Bases and Forward Operating Bases’ within the period under review.

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