

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2014

maritime

Immigration introduces departure notice for vessels

Comfort Oseghale

THE Lagos Marine Command of the Nigeria Immigration Service has introduced a mandatory departure notice for vessels that call at the Lagos ports.

It said this was done to address the problem of illegal issuance of departure

clearance by unscrupulous immigration officials to shipping agents whose vessels stayed beyond their expected departure time.

A circular dated November 13, 2014 was sent to all the unit heads in respect of the development alongside other issues last Thursday.

The Comptroller of the

command, Mrs. Taiwo Olayemi, confirmed the development to our correspondent, stressing that it is the duty of the NIS to protect the country's territorial waters, especially against foreign nationals that might want to destabilise the country.

She said, "We want to

ensure that the vessels that come here have business to do in Nigeria. We equally have to ensure that no crew member is a fugitive and that there are no stowaways.

"I introduced the notice when I discovered that vessels were staying past their due date after they had been cleared for departure. If any

vessel has to delay departure for any reason, we should be notified accordingly.

"The CGI has made efforts to train immigration personnel to international standard so we are trying to enforce immigration laws in alignment with the standard."

An immigration official who chose to remain anonymous told explained that as a result of the development, shipping agents would now have to notify immigration officials officially to issue departure clearance for their vessels when they were ready.

He said, "Some unscrupulous officers had been issuing the agents the clearance knowing full well that the vessels would not leave the country on the said date.

"The agents claimed that they had obtained the departure clearance well ahead of time to enable the vessels to leave without delay whenever they were ready."

In the circular, Olayemi also conveyed the displeasure of the Comptroller General of Immigration, Mr. David Parradang, over the high rate of corruption and extortion at the command.

As a result, officers were instructed to stay not more than 15 minutes on board vessels for clearance and submit daily/weekly reports of their operations to the CIS's office.

They were also to stop the extortion and harassment of ship captains over minor mistakes on their seaman's book and other documents.