AN ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL MARITIME ORGANIZATION (IMO) IN PROMOTING MARITIME SAFETY AND SECURITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Despite the existence of a comprehensive international regulatory framework developed by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to promote maritime safety and security, Nigeria continues to face serious maritime threats such as piracy, armed robbery at sea, illegal bunkering, smuggling, and unsafe shipping practices within its coastal and offshore waters. Although Nigeria is a State party to other conventions, persistent security incidents in the Gulf of Guinea raise concerns about the practical effectiveness of these standards in Nigeria. Enforcement challenges have hindered the full realization of IMO objectives within the Nigerian maritime sector. For Nigeria, whose economy relies heavily on maritime trade and crude oil exports, the organization plays a vital role in shaping national maritime policy and regulatory practices. This study therefore critically evaluated the role of the IMO in promoting maritime safety and security in Nigeria by using a doctrinal research approach which analysed the relevant international legal framework. The paper further analysed the challenges posed by piracy, illegal bunkering, and weak enforcement mechanisms. The study found that despite

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Nigeria's ratification of major IMO conventions, maritime insecurity and institutional weaknesses continue to undermine effective implementation. It recommended strengthening enforcement mechanisms, among others to ensure better compliance and improved maritime security outcomes.

Keywords: International Maritime Organization, Maritime Safety, Maritime Security, and Nigeria.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

International shipping plays a vital role in Nigeria's economy, particularly through crude oil exports and maritime trade. Nigeria is expected to benefit from globally harmonized standards on maritime safety and security as a member of the International Maritime Organization (IMO). However, despite Nigeria's ratification and partial domestication of major IMO conventions such as SOLAS, STCW, ISPS and SUA, the country continues to experience persistent maritime insecurity, piracy, illegal bunkering, smuggling, unsafe navigation practices, and infrastructural and institutional weaknesses within its maritime administration. These continuing challenges raise concerns regarding the extent to which IMO regulations have been effectively implemented and enforced within Nigeria's maritime domain.[1] The core problem is therefore the apparent gap between the existence of comprehensive IMO safety and security standards and the continuing realities of maritime risk and insecurity in Nigeria. This calls for

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[1] Onyenucheya, A. 'Enhancing Blue Economy with Improved Security Infrastructure' *The Guardian* (Lagos, 13 August 2025).

a critical analysis of the IMO's role, the effectiveness of Nigeria's compliance mechanisms, and the structural barriers that hinder full realization of IMO objectives in Nigeria. Maritime transport underpins Nigeria's economy. The nation's major seaports (Apapa, Tin Can Island, Onne, Warri, and Calabar) serve as gateways for crude oil exports and manufactured imports.[2] Consequently, maritime safety and security are essential to national development and regional stability. However, Nigeria has historically confronted serious maritime security challenges, particularly piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea. Thus, this paper evaluates the IMO's role in promoting safety and security and examines Nigeria's engagement with the IMO framework.

Myriad security threats have increasingly afflicted vital global sea lanes and now severely undermine stability closer to Nigerian shores.[3] Key contemporary risks centre around piracy, hijacking, kidnapping, oil theft, and cyber hacking targeting commercial ships, port infrastructure and offshore platforms.[4]

2. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND MANDATE OF THE IMO

Historically, the UN Maritime Conference was convened in Geneva on 19th February, 1948 and adopted the IMO on 6th March, 1948. The Convention,

[2] Bivbere, D. *New Seaport Development—Prospects and Challenges: Perspectives from Apapa and Calabar Seaports, Nigeria*. *MDPI*. (2018) <https://www.mdpi.com/2305-6290/4/2/8.> accessed 6 January 2026.

[3] Mejia Jr., M. 'Defining Maritime Violence and Maritime Security' In P.K. Mukherjee, M.Q. Mejia Jr., & G.M. Gauci (eds.), *Maritime Violence and Other Security Issues at Sea* (WMU Publications 2003).

[4] Ogbonnaya, E.A, Nwaorgu, G.O. (2019). Paradigm Shift in the Analysis Methodology of Navigational Safety for Maritime Research and Development. Paper presented at the 5th High Level Atlantic Ocean Dialogue Conference, Lagos, Nigeria.

then known as Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organization, entered into force on 17th March, 1958. During its inauguration on 6th January, 1959, when the Assembly had its first session, the IMO went into force on 22nd May, 1982 in accordance with an amendment to the Convention.[5]

The main purpose of the IMO is to provide machinery for co-operation among governments in the field of governmental regulation and practices relating to technical matters of all kinds affecting shipping engaged in international trade; to encourage and facilitate the general adoption of the highest practicable standards in matters concerning maritime safety, efficiency of navigation and prevention and control of marine pollution from ships.[6] IMO is also empowered to deal with administrative and legal matters related to those purposes. IMO was credited to have successfully promoted international cooperation and standardization in a wide array of matters affecting shipping as well as its wide acceptability.[7]

Nigeria joined the International Maritime Organization (IMO) as a member state on 15 March 1962, becoming part of the global regulatory framework for international shipping, maritime safety, security, and environmental protection under the IMO's auspices. Nigeria today aligns its maritime administration system largely with IMO standards, primarily through

[5] Akperegin, F. E., Anya, E. C. & Anya, A. K. 'The Role of the International Maritime Organization in the Protection of Marine Environment in Nigeria', *KB Law Scholars Journal*, (2024) 1 (6); 35-52. DOI:10.60787/Kbisj-v1i6.53.
[6] Article 1, Convention on the Intergovernmental Maritime Consultative Organization, 1948
[7] Louis B Sohn and others, Law of the Sea in a Nutshell (2nd edn, West Publishing Co., 2010) 459.

NIMASA and other relevant agencies.[8] Nigeria's membership in the IMO has had a significant impact on its maritime regulatory framework and safety practices in several ways, viz:

i. Domestication of International Standards: Following its membership, Nigeria has ratified and domesticated numerous IMO conventions, including those on safety of life at sea (SOLAS), seafarers' training (STCW), and maritime security, integrating them into domestic law primarily through the Merchant Shipping Act (2007) and the establishment of the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) to enforce these standards.[9]

ii. Capacity Building and Technical Cooperation: IMO membership has enabled Nigeria to access training and technical support programs. Nigerian officials and maritime professionals have participated in courses at IMO-affiliated institutions like the World Maritime University and the International Maritime Law Institute, strengthening national expertise in maritime safety, security, and law enforcement.[10]

iii. Strengthened Maritime Legal Frameworks: Nigeria's maritime legislation now reflects international norms, for example, through adoption of IMO safety rules and the development of the Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences Act

[8] Aderoju, T., 'Legal Framework for Maritime Law in Nigeria', *International Bar Association* (2022)< Available at www.ibanet.org> accessed 6 January 2026.
[9] Available at www.nimasa.gov.ng. accessed 6 January 2026.
[10] Osamgbi, I. 'Building Bridges', *The Voyage,* (2017) 5 (3)<www.nimasa.gov.ng.> accessed 6 January 2026.

(SPOMO) 2019, which aligns national piracy law with IMO and UNCLOS frameworks.[11]

iv. Enhanced Regional and International Engagement:
As an IMO member, Nigeria participates in global regulatory processes and regional security collaborations such as the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, which coordinates maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. Nigeria's recent election (2025) to the IMO Council demonstrates renewed confidence in its contributions to maritime safety and security governance.[12]

3.0 ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL MARITIME ORGANISATION IN PROMOTING MARITIME SAFETY AND SECURITY

The International Maritime Organization (IMO**)** promotes maritime safety and security by developing and administering uniform international regulations that govern ship construction, equipment, operation, and security, notably through instruments such as the SOLAS Convention**,** the ISPS Code**,** the STCW Convention**,** and related safety and security frameworks. Through these instruments, the IMO sets minimum global standards to prevent maritime accidents, protect lives at sea, enhance port and ship security, and combat threats such as piracy and armed robbery, while also supporting member states through technical assistance, capacity-building, and monitoring of compliance to ensure effective implementation and enforcement of maritime safety and security obligations worldwide.[13]

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[11] Obia, V. "IMO Council: Nigeria Fought a Good Fight". *This Day*, (Lagos, 6 January 2026).

[12] Egole, A. "IMO Win Heralds Fresh Momentum for Nigeria's Maritime Industry" *PUNCH*, (Lagos, 15 December 2025).

[13] Mukherjee, P. K., & Mejia, M. Q. *The International Maritime Organization: Its role under the law of the sea*. (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing 2013); Allen, M. E. &

The IMO has played a pivotal role in promoting maritime safety and security by establishing comprehensive and universally accepted legal frameworks such as SOLAS, MARPOL, STCW, and the ISPS Code**,** which have significantly reduced maritime accidents, improved ship and port security, and enhanced global cooperation against threats like piracy. However, a critical assessment reveals that the IMO's effectiveness is often constrained by its dependence on flag and port states for implementation as many flag and port states lack comprehensive implementation framework and other challenges affecting the role of IMO as would be considered later in this paper in respect of Nigeria. The IMO's dependence on flag and port state[14] has limited its effectiveness because it lacks direct enforcement powers**,** relying instead on individual states to implement, monitor, and enforce its conventions within their jurisdictions. Where flag states exercise weak oversight, often due to limited capacity, inadequate resources, or the

Solm, E. D. 'International Maritime Organisation', *Joint Inspection Unit of United Nations* (1984)<https;//www.unjiu.org> accessed 9 January 2026.

[14] The role of the flag state is to conduct regular inspections of each of their ships to ensure the safety of their cargo and crew members. The state that the vessel registers with is also responsible for collecting taxes from that vessel and regulating the pollution levels of ships under their flag. In turn, ships must follow any policies enforced by the country that they register with. Flag states are powerful and crucial in how they can influence and protect waters from potential threats. Because they can create regulations and legislature that all ships under their flag must follow, flag states can help prevent and stop international maritime issues, like illegal fishing or piracy. On the other hand, Port State Control Officers can inspect ships for various reasons to ensure they are up to code. Vessels transporting hazardous goods receive regular inspections to make sure the materials are secure and pose no danger to the environment or the public. When an officer marks a ship for necessary repairs, ships must undergo inspection before leaving the port again to ensure they are safe to sail. Ships require inspections each time they enter a port for the first time within a year. Any ship entering a port that's had recent detentions or suspensions must also receive an inspection from Port State Control Officers. Because port authorities communicate regularly, officers can easily spot ships they might need to inspect upon their arrival.

operation of flags of convenience, international safety and security standards are inconsistently applied, allowing substandard ships to continue operating. Similarly, variations in port state control capacity mean that enforcement is uneven across regions, undermining uniform compliance and reducing the overall impact of IMO regulations despite their comprehensive and well-designed legal frameworks.[15]

4.0 KEY IMO LEGAL INSTRUMENTS ON MARITIME SAFETY AND THEIR APPLICATION IN NIGERIA

4.1 International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea and Ship Safety (SOLAS)

It is the most important international treaty concerning the safety of merchant ships**,** establishing minimum safety standards in the construction, equipment, and operation of ships to ensure the protection of life at sea. The International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) is widely regarded as the cornerstone of the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) legal framework for maritime safety. Adopted in 1914 in response to major maritime disasters, particularly the *Titanic* tragedy[16], SOLAS

[15] Mukherjee, P. K. op cit (n 13); United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *Review of Maritime Transport 2023*. (Geneva, UNCTAD 2023); Churchill, R. R., & Lowe, A. V. *The law of the sea* (3rd ed. Manchester, Manchester University Press 1999).

[16] The RMS Titanic**,** a British passenger liner, sank on 15 April 1912 after colliding with an iceberg in the North Atlantic during its maiden voyage from Southampton to New York, resulting in the deaths of over 1,500 passengers and crew**.** The disaster exposed serious deficiencies in maritime safety at the time, including insufficient lifeboats, inadequate emergency procedures, poor radio communications, and the absence of uniform international safety standards. In response, the international community convened the first International Conference on Safety of Life at Sea in 1913–1914**,** which led to the adoption of the first International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) in 1914**.** Although World War I delayed its entry into force, the Titanic tragedy permanently

establishes minimum international safety standards for the construction, equipment, and operation of merchant ships engaged in international voyages. The current regime, the 1974 SOLAS Convention (as amended)**,** reflects the IMO's continuous effort to adapt safety regulations to technological developments and emerging maritime risks.[17]

SOLAS 1974 has ensured that risks are managed by "properly sharing" between the four main stakeholders: Ship-owner, Flag State, Classification Society (Class) and Port State. This sharing ensures that a safety net is created through Survey, Audit, Inspection and Examination to verify that the provisions of SOLAS 1974 are being complied with and therefore ensure that risks are sufficiently and efficiently managed.[18] There three

transformed maritime safety regulation and laid the foundation for the modern SOLAS regime now administered by the International Maritime Organization (IMO**)-** History<https://www.google.com/search?q=History.com+Titanic+tragedy+1912.> accessed 8 January 2026.

[17] International Maritime Organization<https://www.imo.org/en/About/Conventions/Pages/International-Convention-for-the-Safety-of-Life-at-Sea-(SOLAS).aspx> accessed 8 January 2026.

[18] Joseph, A. & Dalaklis, D. 'The International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea: Highlighting Interrelations of Measures Towards Effective Risk Mitigation', *Journal of International Maritime Safety and Shipping*, (2021) 5 (1); 1-11.<https://doi.org/10.1080/25725084.2021.1880766.>

basic risks the SOLAS 1974 addressed which includes: Structural Integrity and Stability Related risk,[19] Fire risk[20] and Navigational risk[21]

The core objective of SOLAS is to establish minimum safety standards for the construction, equipment, and operation of merchant ships, ensuring that ships flagged by contracting states comply with uniform global requirements designed to protect life at sea. OLAS applies primarily to sea-going commercial vessels engaged in international voyages.[22] The Convention is divided into several chapters, each addressing a distinct aspect of ship safety, including:[23]

i. Construction standards (watertight integrity, stability, and structural fire protection)

[19] ibid. The importance of this risk is evident from the fact the sea is indeed a very dangerous place and the common saying that a ship itself is the best available "lifeboat" for the crew while conducting the voyage. Ensuring safety at sea is made possible via the mitigation of all "primary and secondary" risks by SOLAS 1974; this holistic approach is based on identifying all risks interrelations and then ensuring that vessels are being designed with resiliency to encounter the perils of the seas. ships are required to be designed, built and maintained in compliance with a classification society's_structural, mechanical and electrical specifications. This results in effective micro risk management as the classification society is involved from the stage of ship design up to the end of the ships life when recycled.

[20] Regulation 2 of Chapter II-2 specifies five safety objectives with regards to a fire which is prevention, reduction to risk to life, reduction to the risk of damage, contain, control and suppress the fire and provide easy means of escape from spaces on fire. This risk mitigation is achieved by constructional requirements, detection and alerting requirements, fitment of equipment for extinguishment, specifying materials which are fire protective/retardant for ships construction, etc.

[21] ibid. This risk is most often associated with consequences such as collision, grounding or contact damage. Incidentally, the collision of RMS Titanic with an iceberg on the ill-fated night was also linked to a navigational risk.

[22] See the Preamble to the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS)**.**

[23] < https://www.imo.org/en/about/conventions/pages/international-convention-for-the-safety-of-life-at-sea-(solas),-1974.aspx> accessed 8 January 2026.

ii. Fire detection and control systems
iii. Life-saving appliances and arrangements (LSA) such as lifeboats and lifejackets
iv. Radio communications and distress alerting
v. Safety of navigation**,** including navigational equipment and watch keeping
vi. Carriage of dangerous goods
vii. Safety management systems under the ISM Code

Through these provisions, SOLAS creates a comprehensive framework that ensures safety considerations span the entire lifecycle of a ship, from design and construction to operation and emergency response. In doing so, SOLAS supports a culture of safety within the maritime industry, ensuring that ship operators and crews are adequately trained and equipped to respond to emergencies.[24]

While SOLAS is an international instrument, implementation occurs at the national level. Flag states[25] are responsible for incorporating SOLAS standards into domestic law and for certifying that vessels flying their flag comply. Port states[26] also exercise regulatory control through Port State

[24] ibid.
[25] A flag state is simply the country in which a ship is registered and whose laws and regulations govern that ship, regardless of where it actually sails. For example, if a ship is registered in Nigeria, Nigeria is the flag state, and the ship must comply with Nigerian maritime laws as well as international rules that Nigeria has adopted. Thus, the flag state "owns" the ship legally and is responsible for its safety, security, and compliance with international regulations.
[26] A port state is simply the country whose port a ship enters, and which has the authority to inspect that ship and enforce maritime safety, security, and environmental rules while it is in that port. **T**he port state checks visiting ships to ensure they comply with international and national maritime regulations.

Control (PSC) inspections to verify compliance by foreign-flagged vessels entering their ports. This dual enforcement mechanism, flag state responsibility complemented by port state oversight, enhances the credibility and effectiveness of the regime.

In the Nigerian context, SOLAS has significantly influenced domestic maritime regulation. Nigeria's ratification and partial domestication of SOLAS through national legislation and regulatory agencies such as the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) have improved ship inspection regimes, port safety standards, and compliance with international safety norms. This has contributed to safer shipping operations, increased international confidence in Nigerian ports, and improved protection of seafarers and the marine environment.[27] SOLAS, which aims to ensure the safety of shipping, has been adopted into Nigerian maritime legislation through the Merchant Shipping Act. Notably, provisions related to ship safety management systems and life-saving appliances are essential for mitigating risks in Nigerian waters. Compliance is monitored by the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), which conducts safety inspections and issues safety certificates to vessels adhering to SOLAS standards. One case study highlighting this is the assessment of the safety measures implemented by shipping companies during the COVID-19 pandemic, showcasing how adherence to SOLAS requirements aided operations.28

[27] Joseph, A. *op cit.* (n 18)
[28] Femi Atoyebe & Co. 'The Impact of International Maritime Conventions on Nigerian Shipping Law.' (2025)<https://faco.emagepromotions.com/the-impact-of-international-maritime-conventions-on-nigerian-shipping-law/.> accessed 8 January 2026.

However, despite its strengths, SOLAS faces implementation challenges**,** especially in developing maritime states. Effective compliance requires substantial technical expertise, financial resources, and institutional capacity. In Nigeria, challenges such as aging vessels, enforcement gaps, and limited inspection capacity sometimes undermine full realization of SOLAS objectives. One of the biggest challenges to effective implementation of maritime security and maritime law enforcement measures is that they are seen as departmental issues, issues for the navy, or the coast guard, or the police, or the port authority, or the maritime authority, or customs and border control, with those agencies competing for scarce resources, rather than being part of a national, multi-agency response to developing the port and maritime sector.[29]

4.2 Standards of Training, Certification and Watch keeping (STCW) and Seafarer Competence

Initially introduced in 1978 at the IMO conference held in London and amended in 1995 and 2010, STCW requirements were established by the IMO a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN) to ensure minimum international training standards for all officers and watch-going personnel on large yachts and merchant ships.[30] The STCW Convention establishes global benchmarks for maritime safety and crew competence. It also

[29] Safiyanu, A. T., Modibbo, A. S., *et al* 'Implementation of the International Maritime Conventions and the Challenges of Managing Nigeria's Maritime Domain', *Nassarawa State University, Keffi Journal of Management Research and Development*, (2023) 8(3), 91-105.

[30] Satterwhite, D. & Moorhead, K., 'Influence of Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) standards on Marine Engineering Technology Curriculum' (2023), Proceedings of the 2023 Conference for Industry and Education Collaboration, American Society for Engineering Education.<https://peer.asee.org.> accessed 8 January 2026.

provides the international framework for training and certification to safeguard life at sea and protect the marine environment. Adopted in 1978 and strengthened through the 1995 and 2010 Manila Amendments, the STCW Convention sets uniform global benchmarks for maritime safety and crew competence.[31] Although Nigeria is a signatory, enforcement gaps and limited refresher training undermine full compliance. Nigeria maintains approved maritime academies such as the Maritime Academy of Nigeria in Oron to satisfy STCW requirements. According to the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA, 2021), only about 60% of Nigerian seafarers have completed mandatory refresher training.[32]

Challenges Nigeria faces in the implementation of STCW include substandard maritime training institutions, weak enforcement mechanisms and certification irregularities. Similarly, the International Chamber of Shipping (2023) highlights that while Nigeria contributes significantly to the global seafaring workforce, lapses in enforcement and training quality undermine its reliability.[33]

4.3 Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (COLREG) and Navigational Safety

The Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (COLREG) aims to promote navigational safety by establishing

[31] Anyanwu, O. J., Ombe, T. & David, A. P. 'STCW Compliance in Nigerian Seaports: Empirical Analysis and Global Best Practice Recommendations', *International Journal of Maritime and Interdisciplinary Research (IJMIR),* (2025) 8 (1), 139-149.<https://ijmir.edu.ng/index.php/ijmir/article/view/60.> accessed 8 January 2026.
[32] *ibid.*
[33] *ibid*.

uniform international rules for the conduct of vessels at sea in order to prevent collisions and its Objectives include:[34]

i. To prescribe standardized navigation rules governing vessel steering and sailing in all conditions of visibility.
ii. To regulate the use of lights, shapes, and sound signals to ensure clear communication between vessels.
iii. To define right-of-way rules and responsibilities of vessels to reduce the risk of collisions.
iv. To ensure global uniformity in navigational practices across international waters.
v. To enhance the safety of life, property, and the marine environment by minimizing collision-related accidents.

Some of the key provisions of COLREG are:[35]

i. Right-**of**-way: The COLREGs establish a hierarchy of vessels that determines who has the right of-way in a collision situation. For example, a power-driven vessel has the right-of-way over a sailing vessel.

ii. Rules of the road: The COLREGs also establish a set of rules that vessels must follow when navigating in order to avoid collisions. These rules include things like maintaining a safe speed, giving way to other vessels, and using the appropriate lights and shapes.

iii. Lights and shapes: The COLREGs specify the lights and shapes that vessels must display at night and in restricted visibility. These lights and shapes help other vessels to see each other and avoid collisions.

[34] See the Preamble and rules 1-2 of COLREG, 1972.

[35] Ordu, F. N., 'A Legal Appraisal of Safety at Sea and Marine Pollution, Collision at Sea, Salvage, Ship Wreck and Pollution of Ship in Nigeria' *African Journal of International Energy & Environmental Law (AJIEE)*, (2024), 10, 81-99.

iv. Sound and light signals: The COLREGs also specify the sound and light signals that vessels must use to communicate with each other. These signals are used to warn other vessels of potential hazards and to indicate the intentions of a vessel.
v. Restricted visibility: The COLREGs have special provisions for navigating in restricted visibility, such as fog. These provisions help to ensure that vessels can safely navigate in these conditions.
vi. Traffic separation schemes: The COLREGs also recognize the use of traffic separation schemes (TSS). TSS are designated areas of the sea where vessels are required to follow specific routing rules in order to reduce the risk of collisions.

Nigeria has implemented the COLREG through the Merchant Shipping Act, 2007,[36] which is its major legal framework that regulates collision at sea. The Act provides that the damages recoverable by the claimant under the MSA shall be restoration of the claimant to the same financial position as he would have been in had the collision not occurred.[37] The MSA further states that the liability of a defendant in a collision case is limited to the damages considered to be the direct and immediate consequence of the collision.[38]

Thus, the implementing COLREG in Nigeria brings major benefits such as enhanced maritime safety, reduced ships/vessels accidents, created better traffic discipline, and improved economic security by safeguarding shipping lanes, attracting investment, and supporting the growing blue

[36] Sections 338–344 of Merchant Shipping Act, 2007.
[37] Section 345 of Merchant Shipping Act, 2007.
[38] Siyaidon, J. & Umezuruike, S. 'A Quick Guide to Instituting Maritime Collision Claims in Nigeria' *BUSINESS DAY*, (Abuja, 14 September 2023.

economy and ensuring clearer rules for navigation and preventing collisions, especially with increasing autonomous shipping and maritime activity.

5.0 ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE IMO IN ENHANCING MARITIME SAFETY AND SECURITY IN NIGERIA

5.1 Improved Regulatory Framework

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has strengthened Nigeria's regulatory framework by providing globally harmonized standards and technical guidance for maritime safety, security, and environmental protection. Through Nigeria's adoption and implementation of key IMO instruments (such as SOLAS, MARPOL, STCW, and the ISPS Code) the country has modernized its maritime legislation, enhanced port and ship safety oversight, and improved seafarer training and certification. The IMO has also supported institutional reforms, particularly through capacity-building initiatives involving NIMASA and port authorities, helping Nigeria align its maritime governance with international best practice and strengthening its credibility within the global shipping community.[39]

Nigeria has strengthened its regulatory framework by ratifying and domestically implementing key IMO conventions such as SOLAS, STCW, MARPOL, and related protocols, updating national maritime laws, and enhancing regulatory oversight through NIMASA to align with international safety, security, and environmental standards. Notably**,** NIMASA has ratified IMO conventions and Domesticated the much sought after, Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences (SPOMO) Act.

[39] <https://www.imo.org.> accessed 7 January 2026.

The Act is Nigeria's domestic legislation, signed into law on 22 November 2019 and designed to criminalize piracy, armed robbery at sea, and other maritime crimes in Nigerian waters, aligning with international standards under the IMO and United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).[40]

Furthermore, in line with SOLAS provision, Nigeria has improved its regulatory framework by enacting laws and regulations, chiefly among the regulations is the Marine Safety Investigation Regulations, 2025. The purpose of the Regulations is to ensure that marine casualty and incident investigations in Nigeria's waters are carried out in line with extant laws in Nigeria, International Conventions and industry best practices. The adoption of the provisions of the Marine Casualty or Marine Incident (Casualty Investigation) Code of SOLAS Chapter XI, part I[41] into these Regulations ensures that a common approach is provided for Nigeria and any substantially interested State in the conduct of marine safety investigation.[42] These regulations are meant to prevent marine casualties and marine incidents in the future.[43] Marine safety regulations generally help shipping companies to adhere to safety standards for operational efficiency in the maritime industry which promotes the image of the industry and its competitiveness in the global economy.[44] The regulatory

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[40] <*https://nimasa.gov.ng/nimasas-ratified-conventions-and-the-much-sought-after-spomo-act/*> accessed 7 January 2026.

[41] SOLAS Chapter XI-1 Regulation 6 requires every IMO member state, including Nigeria, to conduct independent safety investigations into very serious marine casualties involving its ships—focused on identifying causes and preventing future accidents rather than assigning blame—and to report the findings to the IMO.

[42] R. 1.3 of the Regulations, 2025.

[43] *ibid*.

[44] Aaron, C. & Didia, J.U.D 'Maritime Safety Regulation and Operational Effectiveness of Shipping Companies in Rivers State, Nigeria', *IRJEMS International Research Journal*

framework is also important for ships operating in oil industry in Nigeria as they establish clear guidelines that ship companies must follow to ensure safe and environmentally responsible practices in Nigerian maritime industry. Thus, it aims to reduce operational risks, ensure environmental sustainability and enhance safety of transportation activities.[45]

5.2 Enhanced Port Security Culture, International Confidence and Trade Facilitation

Port security refers to the protective measures, regulations, and protocols put in place to safeguard maritime infrastructure, cargo, vessels, and personnel from security threats. These threats can range from physical attacks, such as piracy or terrorism, to illegal activities like smuggling, human trafficking, and cyberattacks on port systems. Port security is crucial for both national and economic security, as ports serve as critical gateways for the movement of goods, people, and resources. Ensuring the security port in Nigeria helps protect national interests by preventing disruptions to the supply chain, which could have serious economic consequences. Furthermore, as ports are often the first point of entry into a country, robust port security measures are essential for preventing the smuggling of illegal goods, weapons, and even potential threats to national security, such as terrorism.[46] For example, Implementation of the International Ship and Port

of Economics and Management Studies, (2023) 2 (3), 631-645<DOI: 10.56472/25835238/IRJEMS-v2.32179>.

[45] Bakare, O.A., Aziza, O.R, *et al*. 'A legal and regulatory compliance framework for maritime operations in Nigerian oil companies', *Open Access Research Journal of Science and Technology*, (2024) 12 (01), 092-103.<DOI: https://doi.org/10.53022/oarjst.2024.12.1.0117>.

[46] Fadola, A.B., 'Port Security Compliance: Safeguarding Nigeria's Critical Maritime Infrastructure', *Wukari International Studies Journal,* (2024) 8 (10), 41-55.

Facility Security **(**ISPS) Code[47] has improved surveillance, security planning, and risk assessment. Nigeria has enhanced port security through IMO collaboration by domesticating key conventions, implementing the Deep Blue Project for integrated security (air, sea, land), achieving zero piracy for years, modernizing ports with command centers, strengthening legal frameworks, boosting regional training, and leveraging its new IMO Council seat to influence global policy, leading to reduced insurance, increased confidence, and better compliance with global standards like the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code (ISPS) Code.[48]

In respect to international confidence and trade facilitation, IMO compliance reduces insurance risk premiums and promotes shipping traffic. Maritime analysts say Nigeria's improved security profile has already led to reduced insurance premiums, increased investor confidence, and a gradual rise in shipping traffic, benefits the country hopes to expand with a seat on the IMO Council.[49] International Maritime Bureau data revealed that Nigeria has recorded zero piracy incidents in its waters in the last four years.[50] Nigeria has transformed the Gulf of Guinea (once regarded as a global piracy hotspot) now stands as one of the world's most notable

[47] The International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code requires contracting governments, port authorities, and ship operators to conduct security assessments, develop and implement security plans, designate trained security officers, and apply coordinated security measures to prevent unlawful acts against ships and port facilities.

[48] < https://nimasa.gov.ng> accessed 7 January 2026. The ISPS Code is a mandatory international framework under the SOLAS Convention established by the IMO International Maritime Organization (IMO) to enhance maritime security, requiring ships and port facilities to implement measures against threats like terrorism, especially after 9/11.

[49] Edemumoh, A. 'Nigeria leverages zero-piracy record, blue-economy reforms in bid for IMO council seat', *The Nation Newspaper*, (Abuja, 21 November 2025).

[50] *ibid*.

maritime security turnarounds. Thus, Nigeria has intensified its diplomatic efforts to secure a seat on the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) Council, banking on its four-year zero-piracy record and ongoing blue-economy reforms to gain support ahead of upcoming election.[51]

5.3 Legal Basis for Piracy Prosecution

Nigeria has strengthened its legal basis for prosecuting piracy and other maritime crimes through the enactment of the Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences (SPOMO) Act 2019**,** which criminalizes acts of piracy, armed robbery at sea, kidnapping of crew, and illegal bunkering in Nigerian waters and the Gulf of Guinea.[52] The Act aligns domestic law with international conventions such as UNCLOS and IMO protocols, provides clear definitions of maritime offences, establishes penalties, and empowers authorities (particularly NIMASA and the Nigerian Navy**)** to investigate, apprehend, and prosecute offenders, thereby filling a long-standing gap in Nigeria's maritime security legal framework and enhancing deterrence against maritime crime.[53]

Therefore, since Nigeria joined the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in 1962, the country has made significant strides in maritime governance and safety. It has ratified and domesticated key IMO conventions, including SOLAS, STCW, MARPOL, the ISPS Code, and the SUA Convention**,** modernizing its legal and regulatory framework for shipping safety, seafarer training, environmental protection and port security. Nigeria has established institutions such as NIMASA to enforce

[51] *ibid*.
[52] Section 2 of Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences (SPOMO) Act 2019**.**
[53] <https://nimasa.gov.ng.> accessed 7 January 2026*;* Nwosu, K., 'Prosecution of Piracy under Nigeria's SPOMO Act'. *African Journal of Maritime Law*, (2021) 2(1), 77–95.

these standards, improved port and ship inspections and implemented internationally recognized security measures to combat piracy and maritime crime. Additionally, Nigeria has enhanced its capacity to investigate marine casualties and prosecute maritime offences under domestic laws such as the SPOMO Act 2019**,** thereby strengthening its credibility and compliance within the global maritime community.[54]

6.0 CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS THAT MILITATE AGAINST THE EFFECTIVENESS OF IMO IN NIGERIA

6.1 Weak Enforcement Capacity

This occurs when Nigeria struggles to consistently apply IMO standards due to factors like corruption, inadequate training, and limited equipment. Although Nigeria has adopted IMO standards, enforcement has not always been consistent due to corruption, inadequate training and limited equipment and technology.

6.2 Flag of Convenience and Compliance Gaps

Flags of Convenience (FOC) refers to the practice where a ship is registered in a country (the "flag state") other than the country of the ship's owner**,** usually to take advantage of less strict regulations, lower taxes, cheaper labour, or weaker enforcement**.** Compliance gaps on the other hand, arise because ships flying flags of convenience may not fully follow international safety, security, or environmental standards**,** and the flag state may have limited capacity or willingness to enforce regulations**.** This creates risks for

[54] *ibid*.

maritime safety, security, and environmental protection in waters where these ships operate, including Nigerian waters.[55]

For instance, some ships owned by Nigerian companies are registered under foreign flags**,** such as Panama, Liberia, or the Marshall Islands, because these countries have less stringent safety, security, and environmental regulations**.** As a result, these vessels may not fully comply with IMO standards such as SOLAS, MARPOL, or the ISPS Code. This creates compliance gaps**,** meaning that even though Nigeria has strong maritime laws and regulations, it cannot fully control or enforce safety and security standards on these foreign-flagged ships, which can increase the risk of accidents, pollution, and piracy in Nigerian waters**.**[56]

6.3 Human Resources and Training

There is a lack of training and manpower capacity development and this is indeed a setback in the attempt to enhance the human resources sector of the maritime industry, which affects the effectiveness of IMO.[57]

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[55] <https://www.scribd.com/document/36391727/Flag-of-Convenience> accessed 9 January 2026; Okonkwo, T., 'International maritime legal regime and the escalation of flags of convenience practices' *International Journal of Law*, (2018) 4 (1), 1-9.<https://www.lawjournals.org/assets/archives/2018/vol4issue1/3-5-15-921.pdf> accessed 9 January 2026.

[56] <https://www.virtuemarine.nl/post/flags-of-convenience-definition-benefits-challenges> accessed 9 January 2026.; Space-Eyes, 'Flags of Convenience: The Double-Edged Strategy of Maritime Operations.' (2025)<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/flags-convenience-double-edged-strategy-maritime-operations-qssre.> accessed 9 January 2026.

[57] Faith, A. E., 'The Maritime Industry of Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects.' *Danubius Journals.* (2025)<https://dj.univ-danubius.ro/index.php/DWP/article/view/126/285> accessed 9 January 2026.

6.4 Funding

Nigeria has acquired enough revenue but unfortunately, it still has the problem of paucity in capitals and funds. There are problems of embezzlement in maritime in sector in Nigeria and therefore it poses a lot of risks for foreign investments.[58]

7.0 CONCLUSION

The IMO has significantly shaped maritime safety and security standards globally and within Nigeria. However, its effectiveness is limited globally by factors such as lack of direct enforcement powers**,** relying instead on individual states to implement, monitor, and enforce its conventions within their jurisdictions. Through instruments such as SOLAS, STCW, ISPS and SUA, it has guided Nigeria toward a modern maritime safety framework. Some of the benefits Nigeria derived from IMO include, but not limited to improved regulatory framework, enhanced port security, international confidence, trade facilitation and legal basis for piracy prosecution. Despite all these, the effectiveness of IMO in Nigeria is limited by certain challenges such as enforcement weaknesses, funding, inadequate training, among other things. Strengthening domestic implementation, enhancing naval and regulatory cooperation, and sustaining political commitment remain essential to consolidating gains.

To address challenges in implementing IMO standards in Nigeria, it is recommended that the government strengthens enforcement capacity by combating corruption, upgrading equipment, and providing continuous training for maritime officials; enforce stricter registration and flagging regulations to reduce the use of flags of convenience and ensure

[58] *ibid*.

compliance; develop human resources through specialized training programs, partnerships with international institutions, and enhanced maritime education; improve funding by increasing budget allocations, ensuring financial transparency, and promoting public-private partnerships. offering financial incentives for compliant shipping operators and engaging stakeholders to highlight the long-term benefits of adherence to maritime safety and security regulations.