Kogi man signs Akpoti-Uduaghan’s sexual harassment petition against Akpabio

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The suspended Kogi Central senator, Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan, resubmitted her sexual harassment petition against Senate President Godswill Akpabio on Thursday, minutes before she was controversially suspended from the upper legislative chamber.  
  
The petition, signed by Zubairu Yaqubu, who described himself as a concerned Nigerian citizen from Kogi Central Senatorial District, accused Mr Akpabio of harassing Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan sexually. It also accused him of abuse of office and obstruction of legislative duties.  
  
Initial dismissal on procedural violations  
  
Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan first presented the petition on Wednesday but it was dismissed by the Senate Committee on Ethics, Privileges, and Public Petitions due to procedural violations.  
  
The Chairman of the committee, Neda Imasuen, explained that Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan had personally signed the petition, which violated Senate Order 40 (4), a rule that prohibits senators from submitting petitions they have signed themselves.  
  
The dismissal led to a social media outcry, with many Nigerians calling for Mr Akpabio’s resignation as Senate president to ensure accountability and transparency in the matter.  
  
Some critics also expressed concerns that the dismissal of the petition raised suspicion that the lawmakers were protecting the Senate president rather than ensuring justice.  
  
Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan then resubmitted the petition on Thursday, this time signed by her constituent as permitted by Senate rules. However, she was suspended a few minutes later for an earlier incident, and many Nigerians have raised concerns about the timing of the suspension.  
  
The Senate Leader, Opeyemi Bamidele, however, explained that Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan was suspended for six months for flouting the Standing Rules of the upper chamber during a controversy over sitting arrangements, and not over allegations of sexual harassment against Mr Akpabio.  
  
Resubmission and acceptance  
  
Despite the dismissal of her petition on Wednesday, Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan was not discouraged. The next day, Thursday, she resubmitted the petition, this time ensuring it was signed by her constituent in compliance with Senate rules.  
  
She formally represented the petition during the plenary.  
  
“I have a petition by a Nigerian citizen and a constituent of Kogi Central under the name of Zubairu Yaqubu and the petition is against the President of the Nigerian Senate, Senator Godswill Akpabio for sexual harassment, abuse of office and malicious obstruction of legislative functions of distinguished Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan. With your kind permission, may I please lay this petition,” she said.  
  
The Senate president, who was presiding over the plenary, responded by asking if there were any legal barriers preventing its submission.  
  
Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan said there was none.  
  
Acknowledging this, Mr Akpabio allowed the petition to be laid before the Senate and referred it to the Committee on Ethics, Privileges, and Public Petitions.  
  
He, thereafter, directed the committee to report back within four weeks.  
  
“Please, proceed to lay the petition since you said there’s no legal impediment.  
  
“Distinguished colleagues, Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan has a petition from her constituent and she has also further confirmed before all senators that the matter in issue is not in any court of law. I have no reason not to take her word for it. Accordingly, the petition is referred to the committee on ethics privileges and public petitions to report to the Senate in four weeks.”  
  
However, there are reports that there were already cases in court about the matter when Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan resubmitted the petition.  
  
On 1 March, Ekaette Akpabio, the Senate president’s wife, filed two defamation lawsuits against Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan at the Federal High Court, Abuja.  
  
In the suit marked CV/814/25 and CV/816/25, Mrs Akpabio demanded N250 billion and N100 billion in general damages, respectively, from Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan over the allegations against the Senate president. It is not clear if the court papers had been served on Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan at the time she submitted her petition.  
  
Previous allegations  
  
This was not the first time allegations of sexual harassment had been raised against Mr Akpabio. In 2020, Joy Nunieh, the former Acting Managing Director of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), also accused him of similar misconduct.  
  
However, Mr Akpabio denied the allegations, including the fresh petition from Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan, claiming that he had never sexually harassed her or any woman.  
  
Also, this is not the first time Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan has made sexual allegations against public figures. In 2021, she accused former presidential aide Reno Omokri of similar misconduct. Mr Omokri denied the allegations and even challenged her to take a lie detector test. He publicly provided evidence that he was not in Nigeria at the time Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan said he sexually assaulted her in the country.  
  
  
  
She has also accused an unnamed minister of sexually assaulting her while he was in office. In the viral video of the allegation, she did not name the minister.  
  
Last Thursday, Senate Leader Opeyemi Bamidele addressed another claim made by Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan on Arise Television where she alleged that he called her late at night and warned that she would “go down” if Mr Akpabio continued to face criticism over his “nightclub” comment.  
  
Mr Bamidele acknowledged making the phone call but explained that his intention was to mediate and reconcile her with Mr Akpabio following the controversy surrounding the remark made in July 2024.  
  
Possible consequences of latest petition  
  
The Senate ethics committee is expected to debate Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan’s latest petition and invite all the parties concerned to appear before it. However, if the committee confirms that the matter was already in court when she presented the petition, it would not entertain it based on Senate rules that forbid such.  
  
She could also be accused of giving false information on the Senate floor if the committee establishes that she was aware of the suit in court before submitting the petition.  
  
Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan’s credibility could be questioned, and Mr Akpabio or his supporters might use this to discredit her allegations.  
  
If the committee confirms that the matter was indeed in court, it could recommend that the petition be dismissed again on procedural or technical grounds.