Natasha in New York City, By Sam Akpe

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From a position of trampling upon the rules of the Senate, she has gained a global audience and sympathy on an issue that is still an ordinary allegation. All she did was to change the narrative. While we keep arguing over truth, facts or lies, she has strategically picked her moment and has awed the world.  
  
Did you watch her addressing the global community in New York? Her voice evoked instant compassion. Her feminine demeanour stirred anticipated non-verbal sympathy. Then, she sobbed, and that immediately brought the hall to a pin-drop empathy.  
  
Dramatically, hot tears tumbled down her dreamy face. Cameras clicked. Emotions gripped the audience. The world watched. Silence reigned. Her voice magnified. Someone whispered, whoever hurt this woman has hurt womanhood.  
  
None of these scenes affected her audacious deportment. She seized the moment. Delivered her short speech with clarity, faultlessly playing to the eager gallery. She excellently applied all the rules required for showboating.  
  
Promptly, she created global headlines by waking up passions among women across the world. If this was a drama, it was not only well-scripted, but superbly rehearsed, and skilfully staged. It was an Oscar performance.  
  
Her name is Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan, a senator, a mother, a wife and a friend to many. I love the name Natasha, although I have no idea what it means. It sounds Ukrainian, quite unique — and even romantic. Kindly permit any further reference to her in this article as simply Natasha.  
  
Let me start by declaring my moral assets. I have never met Senator Natasha in person. I have only noticed her beauty and guts from afar. But, from what I perceive of her, even from a comfortable distance, she must be tough, unyielding, and brilliant.  
  
Here is a stubbornly determined woman in pursuit of her rights — the right to be heard, the right to have her way, even if it means violating established protocols.  
  
She has not allowed the pursuit of her beliefs to be intimidated by rules.  
  
Natasha is the kind of person we used to say in the Nigerian metaphorical jargon: trouble dey sleep, yanga go wake am up. The Senate has woken up the lioness in her. She is on the offensive. No one seems capable of calling Natasha to order. After Natasha, the Senate will never be the same again!  
  
Naturally, people with righteous anger easily win my sympathy. But is this righteous anger? Either way, Natasha knows how to create headlines. Her media consultant deserves a bigger pay. After setting the local media landscape ablaze with her story, she went to the biggest headline-making scene in the world — New York City.  
  
I was awed watching her presentation at the Inter-Parliamentary Union Conference in New York. She told them her story with tears in her eyes and a voice soaked in emotions. She made it clear that she was not speaking for herself but for every woman in her shoes.  
  
I wish she had a better story to tell about her country. I wish she went there to seek global help against hunger and insecurity. Instead, she went to wash dirty local linens in a global stream.  
  
Suddenly, Nigeria is back in the news for the wrong reasons. World media headlines on our country have turned sour again. Diplomatic discussions have shifted from economic help to something luridly sensational. What shall we tell our children!  
  
People would rather be moved by the tears of a beautiful woman, claiming sexual harassment. I must confess that Natasha deserves a huge applause. She is unflinching in her campaign against Senator Godswill Obot Akpabio, even if she has to twist the truth a little to suit her purpose.  
  
Yes, Nigerian children are facing hunger and malaria attacks. Most of them are out of school. Their parents are jobless and poverty-stricken. the cost of transportation is rising daily and has affected costs of food. No meal has a square look these days. Yet, we are discussing sexual harassment on a world stage. What an irony!  
  
Here is a bit of what Natasha told the world parliamentarians: “I come with a heavy heart from Nigeria. But first, I’d like to apologise to Honourable Kathila Obara. I am not here to bring shame to our country. I am here to seek help for the women of Nigeria.  
  
“Again, my name is Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan. Five days ago, on the 6th of March, 2025, I was suspended. As a senator, I was suspended illegally because I submitted a petition of sexual harassment against the president of the Nigerian Senate, Senator Godswill Akpabio.  
  
“I thought that by submitting the petition, he would recuse himself and both of us will submit ourselves to the Committee on Ethics, Privileges and Public Petition for a fair and transparent investigation. Unfortunately, I was silenced and I was suspended.  
  
“I was suspended for six months, amongst many other stringent conditions, such as taking away my security and all the officials, vehicles, and other items handed over to me as a senator.  
  
“My salaries would be cut off. I must not appear anywhere near the National Assembly. And for six months, I’m not to introduce myself or present myself as a senator locally in Nigeria or internationally.  
  
“That means I am here illegally. But I have no other place to go but to come here and speak to you women. Because this is a bigger picture.”  
  
“This is a bigger picture. It depicts the crisis of women’s political representation. My suspension is not just about me. It’s about the systemic exclusion of women from political leadership in Nigeria. Women make up 3.6 per cent of political office-holders.  
  
“And in the Senate, it’s just 2.8. We have 109 men, and only four of us are women. So right now, it’s 108 with only three women. This is a clear case of political victimisation, punishment for speaking out against insecurity, corruption, and gender-based violence. The United Nations Declaration 48/104 declares sexual harassment as a form of gender violence.  
  
“The Senate action is an assault on democracy. I was elected by my constituents to represent them, yet a few powerful men have unilaterally decided to silence their voices by suspending me for six months. My call for an open and transparent investigation into harassment allegations has been met with hostility instead of accountability.  
  
“If a female senator can be treated this way in the full view of the world, imagine what partners in Nigeria will go through every day, in workplaces and in universities.”  
  
Since I was not in New York, I am not sure Natasha told the IPU her story from the beginning. That was quite tactical of her. Who would be interested in the Senate’s sitting arrangement, in line with the Senate’s Standing Orders? That is a local problem.  
  
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My unsolicited advice is this, let those who run commentaries on this issue have a good grasp of the facts. The issue of sexual harassment is so crucial to any woman that the temptation is to brush aside reasoning and urgently call for Godswill’s head, when he is yet to be found guilty.  
  
I love it when people challenge authorities or pursue their rights on the basis of facts — verifiable facts. I love it when people seek justice with clean hands. I love it when people tell the truth — the truth as God knows it, and not an inaccurate narrative.  
  
That is why I am concerned about the issues raised by Natasha. Those who care for the truth know that she was not suspended from the Senate because of the petition over alleged sexual harassment.  
  
The Senate said she was suspended because while seeking justice over sitting arrangements and, later, while peddling allegations of sexual harassment, she violated all the rules that would have helped her case.  
  
However, this was not what she told the IPU women. She made no mention of the rules she is said to have violated. Who should we believe — Natasha or the Senate?  
  
It is most likely that from the issue of sitting arrangement to that of submitting a petition, our beloved Natasha was so much in a hurry to nail Godswill that she trampled upon all the rules of engagement. If this be the case, then she is not seeking justice with clean hands.  
  
The Senate, just like the judiciary, worships rules. This is understandable. You cannot make laws without first honouring the procedures for law-making.  
  
By the way, Godswill can only ignore Natasha at his own risk. Natasha would soon appear on CNN with Christine Amanpour, offering answers to deep questions. By the time this matter is over, a lot of harm would have been done to Nigeria’s image, that of the Senate as an institution, and Godswill as a politician.  
  
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The move to remove Godswill as Senate president has been a full-time assignment for some people, such that any issue that would clinch and hasten that process is a priority to even some of his colleagues. Natasha already has a lot of converts in this campaign.  
  
The public trial of Godswill in the court of Nigerian women and the men who care to join them is so hasty that his media team has been bombed into total submission and inaction. Meanwhile, Natasha’s publicity machine is roaring and crushing.  
  
Natasha has bruised big toes with unprecedented temerity. She has the nerves! Her profile is rising. But what will the end be like — will it justify the means?  
  
From a position of trampling upon the rules of the Senate, she has gained a global audience and sympathy on an issue that is still an ordinary allegation. All she did was to change the narrative. While we keep arguing over truth, facts or lies, she has strategically picked her moment and has awed the world.  
  
Sam Akpe writes from Abuja.