Senate dismisses Akpoti-Uduaghan’s sexual harassment petition as Ezekwesili, senator clash

Date: 2025-03-26

Source: https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/783717-senate-dismisses-akpoti-uduaghans-sexual-harassment-petition-as-ezekwesili-senator-clash.html

The Senate Committee on Ethics, Privileges, and Public Petitions has again dismissed a petition by Kogi Central Senator, Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan, accusing the Senate President, Godswill Akpabio, of sexual harassment.  
  
The petition, signed by one Zubairu Yakubu, who described himself as a concerned Nigerian citizen from Kogi Central Senatorial District, accused Mr Akpabio of sexually harassing Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan.  
  
The petition also alleged abuse of office and obstruction of legislative duties by the senate president.  
  
The petition was presented on the floor of the Senate by Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan on 5 March, minutes before she was controversially suspended from the upper legislative chamber. It was, thereafter, referred to the ethics committee chaired by Edo South Senator, Neda Imasuen, for review.  
  
The hearing  
  
On Tuesday, Mr Yakubu appeared before the committee, in company of his legal counsel, Abiola Akiyode, and a former Minister of Education, Oby Ezekwesili.  
  
However, he refused to proceed with his testimony unless his principal witness, Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan, was allowed to be present at the National Assembly.  
  
The petitioner accused the committee chairman of bias, making reference to previous public statements where Mr Imasuen reportedly described the petition as “dead on arrival”.  
  
“If the chairman has already declared the petition dead before even hearing it, how can we expect fairness? One of the committee members even went on national television to claim that he was a principal witness for the Senate President. How then can we trust this process,” Mr Zubairu said.  
  
Committee dismisses petition  
  
Following heated verbal exchanges between committee members and Mr Yakubu, the Senate committee dismissed the petition on the grounds that the matter was already before a court.  
  
This decision generated further heated argument as Mr Yakubu questioned why he had been summoned if the committee already knew the case was pending in court  
  
“If they knew the matter was in court, why did they invite me in the first place? This only confirms their bias and lack of respect for due process.”  
  
His legal counsel, Mrs Akiyode, echoed his sentiments and criticised the inconsistency in the Senate’s handling of the petition.  
  
“If the committee had already dismissed Natasha’s initial petition as ‘dead on arrival,’ why did they entertain this one, only to throw it out again? It clearly shows a lack of consistency and due process,” she said.  
  
Ezekwesili and Nwebonyi trade words  
  
Meanwhile, a few minutes before the panel adjourned, Mrs Ezekwesili and Ebonyi North Senator, Onyekachi Nwebonyi, engaged in heated verbal exchange.  
  
The altercation began after Mrs Ezekwesili accused the committee of bias, prompting Mr Nwebonyi to confront her over her choice of words.  
  
Mrs Ezekwesili told the senator to shut up which led him to flare up, demanding to know why the former minister should be talking to a senator in such a manner.  
  
“Why should you talk to a senator like that. You can never be a senator. You are an insult to womanhood,” Mr Nwebonyi said.  
  
Ezekwesili accuses Senate of violating constitution  
  
Speaking to journalists after the committee adjourned indefinitely, Mrs Ezekwesili criticised the Senate’s handling of the case, accusing it of prioritising its internal rules over the Nigerian Constitution.  
  
“The Nigerian Senate keeps telling citizens they are subject to Senate rules, even when those rules violate the Constitution. This is unacceptable in a democracy,” she said.  
  
She further argued that Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan had been denied a fair hearing, in violation of constitutional provisions guaranteeing due process.  
  
“The Senate placed its own rules above the laws of the land. Now, with this petitioner, they have done the same thing—using procedural loopholes to avoid addressing critical issues.”  
  
Independent panel  
  
Mrs Ezekwesili called for an independent panel to review Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan’s petition.  
  
“If a petitioner says they do not believe the Senate committee will give them a fair hearing due to clear bias, it is only just that an independent body reviews the matter.”  
  
She also warned that the Senate’s actions could set a dangerous precedent, where internal procedural rules are used to override constitutional rights.  
  
“The Senate must respect the Constitution. Otherwise, we risk turning our democracy into a system where powerful individuals manipulate processes to silence opposition and suppress justice,” Mrs Ezekwesili said.