Sexual Harassment: Akpabio jokes a lot, Natasha should settle out of court’ – Ex-Minority leader, Olujimi

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Former Senate Minority Leader Abiodun Olujimi has commented on the dispute between Senate President Godswill Akpabio and Kogi Central Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan.  
  
PREMIUM TIMES reported that the dispute began over a seating arrangement, which led Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan to file a defamation lawsuit against Mr Akpabio and his senior legislative aide, Mfon Patrick.  
  
She is seeking N100 billion in damages and N300 million in litigation costs.  
  
The lawsuit stemmed from a Facebook post allegedly made by Mr Patrick after a heated argument between the Senate President and Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan.  
  
The conflict escalated further on Friday when, during an interview with Arise Television, Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan accused Mr Akpabio of sexual harassment.  
  
Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan, a member of the opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), recounted an incident from 8 December 2023, when she and her husband visited Mr Akpabio’s residence in Uyo, the Akwa Ibom State capital.  
  
In response, Mr Akpabio’s wife, Ekaette, defended her husband and dismissed the allegation as unfounded.  
  
She also filed two defamation lawsuits against Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan, demanding N350 billion in damages for tarnishing her husband’s reputation.  
  
‘‘Funny Akpabio”  
  
However, speaking on the controversy in an Arise Television interview on Saturday, Mrs Olujimi, who represented Ekiti South Senatorial District from 2015 to 2023, described Mr Akpabio as humorous.  
  
The 66-year-old said: “I took over from Godswill Akpabio as Minority Leader, so I know him and his wife quite well. He (Akpabio) jokes a lot. He’s fond of making little fun out of everything.  
  
He loves to make everything light, and such a person becomes vulnerable when someone does that. So that makes Akpabio very vulnerable. In the Senate, I saw what Akpabio and others went through as men. Outsiders often victimised them, and I had to step in to support them.  
  
“It’s difficult to explain what Akpabio and others endured in the Senate, so they make light of every issue. Many male senators face immense pressure. It’s not as easy as people assume. They internalise—receiving calls, having their wives dragged into the spotlight, and dealing with issues blown out of proportion. I have had to support some of them, even going home and telling their wives that these allegations couldn’t be true. They are all vulnerable.”  
  
Out of court  
  
Additionally, the journalist-turned-politician urged Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan to allow an amicable resolution without involving the court.  
  
“Regarding the court case, I want to appeal to Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan to take it out of court because we don’t want women to look emotionally unstable. We (women) need to be strong enough to face the men.  
  
“Going to court against the Presiding Officer isn’t good. I know she’s hurt, but she needs to handle it better, and I think that should get out of court as fast as possible,” said Mrs Olujimi.  
  
This newspaper reported that former Senate President Bukola Saraki weighed in on the sexual harassment allegation.  
  
The former governor of Kwara State and a chieftain of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) urged them to appear before the Senate Committee on Ethics, Privileges, and Public Petitions.  
  
Mr Saraki, who served as Senate President from 2015 to 2019, emphasised that both parties must submit themselves to the committee to ensure a fair and transparent resolution.