Sexual Harassment: ‘Natasha’s beauty is her problem’ – Ex-Senator Ogunlewe

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Former Minister of Works, Adeseye Ogunlewe, has weighed in on the ongoing controversy surrounding the sexual harassment allegations involving Kogi Central Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan and Senate President Godswill Akpabio.  
  
PREMIUM TIMES reported that during an interview on Arise Television, Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan alleged that Mr Akpabio sexually harassed her.  
  
The lawmaker was suspended for six months, effective 6 March, following the Senate’s consideration of a report presented by Neda Imasuen, the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Ethics, Privileges, and Public Petitions.  
  
However, Senate Leader Opeyemi Bamidele refuted claims that her suspension was linked to the harassment allegation.  
  
He maintained that she was suspended solely due to persistent misconduct, disregard for Senate rules and gross indiscipline.  
  
Speaking on Arise Television’s ‘The Morning Show’ on Monday, the former senator shared his perspective on why Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan often faced incidents of sexual harassment.  
  
Mr Ogunlewe said: “The beauty of distinguished Senator Natasha is a problem for her because when someone beautiful passes by men, their (men) attitudes change. They can smile, but they may not talk to her. But Natasha’s beauty is a problem for her, and there’s no doubt about that.  
  
“To men, when she (Natasha) is passing, there’s no way they will not look at her, but they may not talk to her. It’s a natural thing for men to look at a beautiful woman because how can you be a man, and when a beautiful woman is passing, you close your eyes? You might tag it as anything, but it’s inborn for men to look at women when they pass by.”  
  
Suspension  
  
However, Mr Ogunlewe, a member of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), condemned Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan’s suspension.  
  
The 81-year-old noted that during his tenure in the Senate, female senators did not perceive themselves as inferior to their male counterparts, citing Ita Giwa and others as examples.  
  
“The harassment didn’t happen in the Senate because she said it happened when she visited Senate President Godswill Akpabio’s home, and that’s a different matter. The committee rushed the whole process because they knew what they were doing.  
  
“They knew that they had to consult widely because there’s a committee on judiciary and legal matters in the Senate that should have looked into the matter and said the suspension was impossible. There is precedent because how can you commit an offence and know it’s against the law?” said the University of Ibadan alumnus.  
  
Ignorance  
  
Additionally, he stated that the conditions imposed by the committee for Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan’s six-month suspension demonstrated the members’ ignorance.  
  
Mr Ogunlewe noted, “The committee didn’t elect Natasha, and the way the committee spoke shows ignorance and a violation of Natasha’s privilege—saying that she shouldn’t parade herself as a senator again. One does not doubt that the committee’s Chairman was under the influence of the Senate President.  
  
“The suspension wasn’t done normally; it was predetermined, and they knew where they were going. They put themselves before the public as disorganised people. They should not have rushed things when they knew their biases would be exposed. They were not serious because that’s what they exhibited.”  
  
He further condemned the haste in Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan’s suspension, emphasising that the committee should have exercised more caution and deliberation.