Sexual Harassment: Senator faults Saraki’s advice to Akpabio

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The Deputy Chief Whip of the Senate, Onyekachi Nwebonyi, has criticised former Senate President Bukola Saraki for advising the current Senate President, Godswill Akpabio, to submit himself to an open investigation over sexual harassment allegations levelled against him.  
  
Mr Nwebonyi, who represents Ebonyi North Senatorial District, described Mr Saraki’s suggestion as a “misplaced” priority and that comparing his ( Saraki) past case with Mr Akpabio’s situation is fundamentally flawed.  
  
The senator said these in a statement on Sunday in Abuja.  
  
“Dr Abubakar Bukola Saraki’s appeal for transparency and institutional protection is noted, but his attempt to draw a parallel between his own past case and the current false allegations against Senate President Godswill Akpabio is fundamentally flawed. The two situations are worlds apart in context, substance, and motivation,” he said.  
  
Saraki’s call for transparency  
  
On Saturday, Mr Saraki, who presided over the Senate from 2015 to 2019, urged Mr Akpabio to ensure that the investigation into sexual harassment allegations levelled against him by Kogi Central Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan is conducted openly and transparently.  
  
The former senate president also urged Mr Akpabio and Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan to submit themselves to the Senate Committee on Ethics, Privileges, and Public Petitions to ensure a fair resolution.  
  
Mr Saraki recalled that during his tenure as senate president, he faced allegations that he imported an official car without paying customs duties.  
  
He said he appeared before the ethics committee to clear his name and allowed the media to cover the proceedings to ensure transparency.  
  
He advised Mr Akpabio to do the same to demonstrate accountability and transparency in governance.  
  
Saraki’s comparison is misguided  
  
Mr Nwebonyi argued that the circumstances surrounding both cases are different and should not be compared.  
  
He said that while Mr Saraki’s case was related to his official duties as senate president, the allegations against Mr Akpabio were personal and required to be treated personally.  
  
Mr Nwebonyi questioned the credibility of the allegations against Mr Akpabio with an argument that the alleged incident occurred over a year ago, yet no complaint was made until Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan was directed to face disciplinary action.  
  
“In Saraki’s case, the matter revolved around his official duties as senate president—specifically, an accusation concerning the importation of an official vehicle. The claim was factually incorrect, and Saraki, knowing this, subjected himself to scrutiny to clear his name. It was an administrative and procedural issue directly tied to his office, and a swift resolution through the Senate Ethics Committee restored confidence in the institution.  
  
“In contrast, what we have before us today is a case of personal, unsubstantiated, and conveniently timed accusations—claims of sexual harassment that supposedly took place over a year ago but surfaced only after the accuser was summoned for disciplinary action. There was no prior complaint, no record of distress, no mention to her husband, and no disclosure to female colleagues in the Senate. Instead, the accusation was unleashed only at the point of reckoning, in a desperate attempt to divert attention from legitimate disciplinary proceedings,” he said.  
  
Dangerous precedent  
  
Mr Nwebonyi warned that if Mr Akpabio follows Mr Saraki’s advice, it could set a dangerous precedent where unfounded allegations could be used to manipulate and disrupt the Senate’s functions.  
  
“If we take Saraki’s argument to its logical conclusion, we would be establishing a dangerous precedent—one where any gold digger or habitual liar can throw out an unsubstantiated allegation and expect the Senate to come to a halt while they are entertained. This is not just about Akpabio; it is about protecting the institution of the Senate from manipulation and blackmail,” he said.  
  
Mr Nwebonyi said Mr Saraki was right in seeking the protection of the integrity of the upper chamber, but that true protection would mean its processes are not hijacked by baseless claims.  
  
“Saraki rightly speaks about protecting the Senate’s integrity, but true protection of the institution means ensuring that its processes are not hijacked by baseless, opportunistic claims. If Natasha has any real grievance about events that occurred outside the Senate, let her pursue those through the appropriate legal channels—not use the Red Chamber and the media as a stage for diversionary theatrics.  
  
“Dr. Saraki’s appeal to precedent is misplaced. His case was about official duties and was addressed in a manner that reinforced institutional accountability. This case, however, is about a personal vendetta and a desperate attempt to escape disciplinary action.”  
  
Mr Nwebonyi urged the Senate and the public not to be influenced by what he described as a diversionary tactic.  
  
“The Senate and Nigerians should not fall for this diversionary tactic. The Senate must stay focused, maintain order, and refuse to be blackmailed into legitimising what is clearly an opportunistic and diversionary falsehood.”  
  
Natasha’s history of sexual harassment allegations  
  
The Senate deputy whip also recalled that Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan had a history of making similar allegations against public figures, including former Kogi Governor Yahaya Bello, former Kogi West Senator Dino Melaye, and former presidential aide Reno Omokri.  
  
“It is well known that Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan has a history of making reckless and false allegations of sexual harassment against prominent figures, including Reno Omokri, Dino Melaye, and Yahaya Bello. These accusations always follow the same pattern: wild claims, media noise, and no evidence. Now, the same strategy is being deployed against the Senate President, not because she is seeking justice, but because she is desperately avoiding accountability for her own actions,” he added.  
  
She never informed the Senate  
  
Mr Nwebonyi asked why Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan never raised the issue on the floor of the Senate despite having opportunities to do so in line with the rules of the Senate.  
  
“Even more telling is the fact that she never brought this complaint to the floor of the Senate—not even when she claimed that her motion on Ajaokuta Steel was ignored despite being listed on the Order Paper. If she truly believed that she was being victimised because of an alleged sexual harassment incident, the proper forum to raise such a grievance would have been the Senate itself,” he said.  
  
He explained that the Senate does not investigate issues based on media reports but on formal complaints within its chambers.  
  
“The Senate only responds to and investigates issues formally raised within its chambers, not in a television interview. If she believes that addressing her grievances on TV is more effective than following due process in the Senate, then kudos to her. However, as a senator, she should know better. The Senate is moved by reason and laws, not sentiments and drama, and those who seek redress must engage the institution through its established procedures, not through media grandstanding.”  
  
Politically motivated accusation  
  
The Ebonyi senator further alleged that the sexual harassment allegations against Mr Akpabio were politically motivated.  
  
“Furthermore, it is critical to note that Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan was appointed as the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Local Content on the 21st of November 2023 before the alleged sexual harassment incident in Ikot Ekpene.  
  
” If she had truly been a victim, why would the Senate leadership, under the same Akpabio she now accuses, assign her such a critical leadership role? This glaring contradiction exposes her claims for what they truly are: a politically motivated and diversionary stunt.”