UPDATED: Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan reports suspension, sexual harassment to global parliamentary body

Date: 2025-03-11

Source: https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/780097-updated-natasha-akpoti-uduaghan-reports-suspension-sexual-harassment-to-global-parliamentary-body-2.html

Kogi Central Senator, Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan, has taken her case to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), seeking international intervention over her suspension from the Senate.  
  
Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan addressed delegates at an IPU assembly held at the United Nations headquarters in New York on Tuesday, where she also raised allegations of sexual harassment against the Senate President, Godswill Akpabio.  
  
The Senate suspended Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan for six months with effect from 6 March, after considering a report by the Senate Committee on Ethics, Privileges, and Public Petitions, which was presented by its Chairman, Neda Imasuen.  
  
At the IPU meeting, Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan spoke emotionally about her experience since the suspension.  
  
She said her fight was not just about her, but about Nigerian women in politics who continue to face systematic marginalisation and harassment.  
  
“I came with a heavy heart from Nigeria. But first, I would like to apologise to Hon. Kafilat Ogbara. I am not here to bring shame to our country, I am here to seek help for the women of Nigeria,” she said.  
  
The Inter-Parliamentary Union, is the global organisation of national parliaments, that promotes peace, democracy, and sustainable development through parliamentary diplomacy and dialogue.  
  
By bringing her case to the IPU, Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan is appealing for international intervention on her suspension because she believed it was politically motivated.  
  
Allegation of sexual harassment and retaliation  
  
Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan told the IPU assembly that her suspension was directly linked to her petition against the senate president whom she accused of sexual harassment.  
  
“Five days ago, on the 6th of March 2025, I was suspended as a senator illegally because I submitted a petition of sexual harassment against the President of the Nigerian Senate, Senator Godswill Akpabio,” she said.  
  
However, the Senate Leader, Opeyemi Bamidele, had earlier denied claims that Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan’s suspension was linked to her allegations against Mr Akpabio.  
  
Mr Opeyemi explained that she was suspended for violating Senate Standing Rules and refusing to adhere to sitting arrangements during plenary session on 20 February.  
  
Despite the official reasoning, some Nigerians believed her suspension was a retaliatory move aimed at silencing her.  
  
The fact that her petition was referred to the ethics and privileges committee just minutes before her suspension fuelled this suspicion.  
  
Harsh conditions of suspension  
  
Mr Akpoti-Uduaghan also detailed the conditions attached to her suspension, one of which restricts her rights and privileges as a senator.  
  
She admitted that her participation at the IPU assembly was illegal because her suspension prevents her from engaging in any international legislative function.  
  
“I thought by submitting the petition, he (senate president) would recuse himself and both of us would submit ourselves to the committee of ethics, privileges and public petitions for a fair and transparent investigation.  
  
“But unfortunately, I was silenced, and I was suspended for six months among many other stringent conditions, such as taking away my security, taking away all the official vehicles and other items that were handed over to me as a senator.  
  
“My salary would be cut off. I must not appear anywhere near the National Assembly. And for six months, I am not to present myself as a senator locally in Nigeria and internationally. I am here illegally, and I have no other place to go but to come here and speak to you,” Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan said.  
  
Systematic exclusion of women in politics  
  
Beyond her experience in the Senate, Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan also told the IPU assembly that her ordeal is a reflection of the challenges faced by Nigerian women.  
  
She argued that her suspension was part of the gender discrimination that prevents women from having a voice in leadership in Nigeria.  
  
“This is a bigger picture. It depicts the crisis of women’s political representation. My suspension is not just about me. It is about the systematic exclusion of women from political leadership in Nigeria. Women make up 3.6 percent of political offices, and in the Senate, it is just 2.8. We have 109 men, and only four of us are women. So right now, it is 108, with only three women,” she said.  
  
Assault on democracy  
  
Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan condemned her suspension and described it as an assault on democracy.  
  
“This is a clear case of political victimisation, punishment for speaking out against impunity, corruption, and gender-based violence. The United Nations Declaration 48-104 declares sexual harassment as a form of gender violence.  
  
“The Senate’s 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 my voice 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,” she added.  
  
She argued that if a female senator could be treated in such a manner on the national stage, then ordinary Nigerian women would likely face worse oppression in workplaces, schools, and society at large.  
  
“If a female senator can be treated this way, in the full view of the world, imagine what ordinary women would go through everyday, in workplaces, in universities,” she said.  
  
Mr Akpabio is a member of the executive committee of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.  
  
Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan’s appeal to the IPU could lead to international pressure on the Senate to review its decision.  
  
If the IPU and other global bodies take up the case, there could be diplomatic engagement regarding her suspension and allegations against Mr Akpabio.