UPDATED: Natasha accuses Akpabio of sexual harassment

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Kogi Central Senator, Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan, has accused the Senate President, Godswill Akpabio, of sexual harassment.  
  
Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan, a member of the opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), made the allegation during an interview with Arise Television on Friday.  
  
The senator detailed an incident from 8 December, 2023, when she and her husband visited Mr Akpabio’s residence in Uyo, the capital of Akwa Ibom State.  
  
During the visit, she alleged that the senate president held her hand, led her around his house, and then made inappropriate advances towards her, even in her husband’s presence.  
  
“It all started on the 8th of December, 2023, which was a day before his birthday and my birthday. We are birthday mates. We were all in Akwa Ibom, because he had a big fanfare in the stadium, myself, my husband, and a few of his close friends, we went to Akwa Ibom.  
  
“At first, we were at Ikot Ekpene, his house in Ikot Ekpene, then we all moved to his house in Uyo, which was about 8 p.m., and he held my hand, and said he wanted to show me around his house. My husband was walking behind us, just three of us, walking around from room to room.  
  
“He showed me the beautiful interior. This was done by this, by that, this designer here, he bought this from us, look how beautiful it is, and then I noticed that he hastened his pace while still holding my hand. My husband was behind, still on his phone, but he was catching up whenever he could. And then he got to this particular sitting room, and he said, “do you like my house?’ I said, of course, sir.  
  
“Every room, beautiful, nice interior, quality taste. He said, ‘now that you’re a senator, I’m going to create time for us to come spend quality moments here. You will enjoy it.’ At that point, I just pulled away, and I was like, I don’t really understand what exactly that meant,” she narrated.  
  
Following this encounter, Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan claimed that her husband advised her against traveling alone or visiting the senate president’s residence.  
  
“But when I turned around, my husband was already near me, and my husband looked at me and looked at him. I was beginning to wonder, did he hear part of that inciting statements or not? And then the senate president, too, I saw that he also had that thought, like, did my husband hear the invitation to treat or not?  
  
“So then the senate president said, oh, by the way, let me show you my chapel. He has a chapel in his house as well. So when we were going to the chapel, you know, we walked in silence and all. So that evening, before we left the senate president’s house at about 11 midnight to the four points in Ikot Ekpene, and my husband asked me, Natasha, what did the senate president whisper to you? What’s he telling you? I thought I should I tell him that he was speaking about bringing me in here at a special time for us to have a good time? Or should I just kill it there, wrap it as if there was nothing, because tomorrow is a big day.  
  
I know how much my husband adores the senate president. He loves him as a brother. My husband would do anything to support him.  
  
“So I told my husband nothing. I just, I can’t remember what I created, but I just gave him some words to mask what was said. After, when we laid in bed, I looked to my right and my husband wrapped his hands around me and he said, my love, you know, you can tell me anything, what did the senate president tell you? Again, I was like, don’t you believe me? I said nothing. Moreover, it’s my birthday in a few minutes, let’s just be happy. Then my husband told me he doesn’t want to see me travel out of the country alone, and I should not go to the senate president’s house, because he has a guest house where many senators do go there, you know, after office to get approvals and all that. So I told him, okay, no problems,” she added.  
  
The senator also recounted another incident where Mr Akpabio allegedly suggested that she “take care of him” to ensure her motions were considered on the Senate floor.  
  
Specifically, she mentioned her motion to investigate corruption in the Ajaokuta Steel Company, which she believed was deliberately obstructed by Mr Akpabio.  
  
“I thought that was going to be the end. But then in February, I wanted to move a motion for the investigation on the ills of a corrupt practice in Ajaokuta Steel Company. I listed that motion five times. It was the sixth time that it was listed on the other paper that was approved.  
  
“Many senators can testify to that. Each time the motion is listed, just before he takes it, he will say, oh, Senator Natasha, we can’t take this motion because the board of the Senate does not accommodate it. Or he will speak on others and then let it drag so that just before that motion is taken, the time will be well spent and wound.  
  
“So he kept on doing that. I went to him in his office and I said, senate president, you know how important this Ajaokuta Steel Company is to me. You know how important it is to my people and to Nigerians. I’ve noticed that you have stepped down this motion. As a matter of fact, a number of senators told me, go and see him and plead with him so that he will take it. I was like, sir, please, why can’t you take this motion? It’s very important. It’s been listed. Then it was listed a third time and stepped down. He then said, Natasha, I’m the chief presiding officer of the Senate. You can enjoy a whole lot if you take care of me.  
  
“At that point, I said, sir, I’ll pretend that I didn’t hear this. He said, well, the ball is in your court. I left his office and when I got home, I told my husband, I didn’t tell my husband what happened. I just told my husband, please, can you speak to the senate president to allow my motion to scale through? I think I also spoke to the DSP, to the leader, Senator Opeyemi, I spoke to a number of senators that they should please intervene and allow him to do that. I never told them what happened.  
  
“My husband had to take a trip to London, then the senate president traveled to London. My husband met with the Senate president in London and pleaded with him, ‘let my wife take this motion on Ajaokuta, it is very important to her’. So it was Senator Barau that actually took it,” she recounted.  
  
Repeated case of sexual harassment  
  
This is not the first time Mr Akpabio will face sexual harassment allegations.  
  
In 2020, Joy Nunieh, the former acting managing director of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), accused Mr Akpabio of sexual harassment.  
  
Mrs Nunieh claimed that she slapped Mr Akpabio in response to his sexual advances towards her.  
  
However, Mr Akpabio who was then Minister of NDDC denied these allegations, describing them as “false, malicious, and libelous.”  
  
Defamation lawsuit and demand for N100 billion in damages  
  
Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan had previously filed a defamation lawsuit against Mr Akpabio and his senior legislative aide, Mfon Patrick, seeking N100 billion in damages and N300 million in litigation costs.  
  
The case resulted from a Facebook post allegedly made by Mr Patrick following a heated argument between the senate president and Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan over a change in her seat in the Senate chamber last Thursday.  
  
Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan had also made allegations of harassment and intimidation within the Senate.  
  
She claimed that her privileges have been revoked and that she has been excluded from international events she was initially nominated for.  
  
The senator believed these actions were parts of the efforts to suppress her voice in legislative discussions.  
  
Senate’s disciplinary action  
  
The Senate had on Tuesday, referred the earlier allegations to its Committee on Ethics, Privileges, and Public Petitions for investigation.  
  
The committee, chaired by Edo South Senator, Neda Emasuen, was given two weeks to submit its findings and recommendations.  
  
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Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan was absent from Tuesday’s plenary session.  
  
As of now, there has been no official response from the senate president’s office regarding these recent allegations.  
  
Eseme Eyiboh, the senate president’s spokesperson did not respond to calls.