ASUU seeks review of existing law on sexual harassment

Date: 2020-02-18

Source: https://guardian.ng/news/asuu-seeks-review-of-existing-law-on-sexual-harassment/

National President of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) Professor Biodun Ogunyemi has canvassed a review of existing laws on sexual harassment, saying such laws should recognise universities autonomy.  
  
Raising concern on the confusion between sexual harassment and sexual abuse, he charged the National Assembly to work towards a review of existing laws on the menace rather than formulate new ones.  
  
Ogunyemi stated this at a public hearing on “Sexual Harassment of Students in Tertiary Educational Institutions Prohibition Bill,” yesterday in Abuja sponsored by Deputy Senate President, Ovie Omo-Agege.  
  
  
  
The public hearing was organised by the Senate Committee on Judiciary, Human Rights and Legal Matters, headed by Bamidele Opeyemi after the bill scaled its second reading on November 6, 2019.  
  
The bill is seeking to end sexual harassment of students in tertiary institutions and impose stiff penalties on perpetrators and intending offenders.  
  
  
  
Although he restated ASUU’s aversion to sexual harassment, Ogunyemi insisted that if there was a law that addressed sexual abuse or harassment, there should be no waste of time on another law.  
  
He said, “There are laws that would address the menace like the Act of 2015. We should reconcile the bill with that act to cover new areas of concern. Are we also going to formulate a separate law to address corruption in universities? Are we going to formulate other laws to address sexual harassment in the police?  
  
  
  
“If there are laws that we find deficient, what does it cost to review them? This bill has failed to take cognisance of various extant legislations that currently deal with sexual offences.”  
  
“We have the autonomy law of 2007, legislated by the National Assembly, which already made provisions for us to address all these. We talk of the institutional procedures; these procedures are irreconcilable with the prosecution.”  
  
  
  
Responding, Executive Director, Youth Alive Foundation (YAF), Dr. Uduak Okon, said the Independent Prohibitions Committee should be protected because it was the first point of redress for students.  
  
“The committee is where cases of assault can be reported, it can be investigated and sanctions can happen. It is only when students are not happy that they go to the High Court. We have to ensure that we protect that committee so that it can do what it is meant to do,” she said.