Army discharges female soldier, exonerates officer in sexual harassment probe

Date: 2024-09-24

Source: https://guardian.ng/news/nigeria/metro/army-discharges-female-soldier-exonerates-officer-in-sexual-harassment-probe/

The Nigerian Army has discharged a female soldier, Private Ruth Ogunleye, from service after she accused a senior officer, Colonel I.B. Abdulkareem, of sexual harassment.  
  
  
  
In January 2024, Ogunleye made the accusations on her TikTok page, @Ogunleyeruthsavage1, where she alleged that Colonel I.B. Abdulkareem, Colonel G.S. Ogor, and Brigadier General I.B. Solebo had made her life unbearable.  
  
She specifically accused Abdulkareem of making repeated attempts to assault her, administering injections against her will, forcibly removing her from her residence, and confining her to a psychiatric hospital for several months after she rejected his sexual advances.  
  
Following these allegations, the Chief of Army Staff, Lieutenant General Taoreed Lagbaja, ordered a thorough investigation into the matter.  
  
Addressing journalists in Abuja on Tuesday, the Director of Army Public Relations, Major General Onyema Nwachukwu, stated, “Upon receipt of her initial complaint, which included allegations of sexual harassment, the Nigerian Army took immediate action. The matter was referred to the Nigerian Army Corps of Military Police, who were tasked with conducting a thorough investigation into the veracity of her claims. The investigation was conducted in accordance with established protocols, with every effort made to ensure a fair and impartial process.  
  
  
  
“It is crucial to assert that the Nigerian Army, in its bid to ensure justice and transparency, conducted an exhaustive review of the facts, testimonies, and evidence presented. The investigation concluded that Colonel I.B. Abdulkareem did not commit the offence of sexual harassment as alleged by ex-Private Ruth Ogunleye. The findings were definitive and based on an objective evaluation of the available information.”  
  
Onyema also revealed that Ogunleye had been recommended for discharge on medical grounds since 2022, but the Nigerian Army, showing sympathy, provided her with the best possible medical treatment before discharging her into civilian life.  
  
“While the Army was addressing the allegations of sexual harassment, further concerns regarding Ruth Ogunleye’s conduct came to light. Her behaviour, both online and offline, raised questions about her deteriorating mental health and emotional stability,” Onyema added.  
  
He further disclosed that medical reports following an evaluation at the National Hospital in Abuja indicated that Ogunleye was suffering from a condition that rendered her medically vulnerable.  
  
  
  
“The medical evaluation confirmed that Ruth Ogunleye was suffering from a condition that made her medically vulnerable,” Onyema said.  
  
Based on her medical condition, the Army decided not to pursue disciplinary action against Ogunleye, opting instead to discharge her from service on medical grounds.  
  
Onyema stated, “In light of this, the Army, though fully capable of proceeding with disciplinary action for her acts of indiscipline and misconduct, opted to exercise compassion and leniency.  
  
“Based on the medical report from the National Hospital and advice from the Nigerian Army Medical Corps, the decision was made to shelve any disciplinary procedures that could have been taken against her. Instead, the Army prioritised her health, understanding that she was in no position to continue with military service. She was subsequently boarded and discharged from service.”  
  
  
  
Ogunleye, despite not being entitled to a pension due to her years of service, was granted a 50 per cent monthly pension for life.  
  
“Despite ex-Private Ruth not serving the requisite number of years to qualify for a pension (10 years), she has nonetheless been discharged from the Nigerian Army with a 50 per cent disability claim, meaning she will receive a 50 per cent monthly pension for life. She has also been paid her Terminal Leave Allowance and Terminal Packing Allowance, as well as her contributions to the Nigerian Army Welfare Insurance Scheme and Benevolent Fund. These payments were made on 14 August 2024 into her FCMB account. Her Security Debarment Allowance for the period she served (5 years and 54 days) has also been paid,” Onyema concluded.  
  
The decision to discharge her was made after she rejected an offer of medical treatment, either from the National Hospital or the Nigerian Army.