Akpabio: Natasha’s sexual harassment allegations traumatised me, Senate

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Akpabio: Natasha’s sexual harassment allegations traumatised me, Senate  
  
Urges critics to stop running uninformed commentaries on legislative chamber  
  
Akpoti-Uduaghan suspended for unruly conduct, not harassment claims – Senate spokesman  
  
Ex-gov Dickson says he’s heard more from suspended colleague, husband  
  
Senate President Godswill Akpabio has spoken of the damaging effect on him and the Senate, of the sexual harassment allegations levelled against him by Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan.  
  
Akpabio said he and other Senators felt traumatised by the allegations.  
  
The Senate President, who spoke at an event to mark the International Women’s Day (IWD), said it was curious that no one complained or heard about the alleged sexual harassment which purportedly happened in December 2023 until “only after the change of seat and change of committee” in the Red Chamber.  
  
Akpoti-Uduaghan, who represents Kogi Central in the Senate, on February 28 alleged that Akpabio made inappropriate advances towards her when she and her husband visited the former governor of Akwa Ibom’s residence in Uyo during his birthday in December 2023.  
  
The Kogi Central senator was moved from being chairman of the Senate Committee on Local Content to that on Diaspora recently.  
  
She was sent on a six-month suspension last week by the Senate for alleged breach of the Senate rules.  
  
‘’It was only yesterday that I realised that what we are talking about only happened when there was a change of seat. That was when all hell was let loose and all sorts of allegations came up; only after the change of seat and change of committee, which my Senators know happen from time to time,” Akpabio said yesterday.  
  
He added: “This is said to have happened on December 8, a day before my birthday, which was celebrated in the stadium in 2023.  
  
“So from the 8th of December 2023, I never heard, my wife never heard, no Nigerian ever heard, even the husband never heard any issue of sexual harassment until her committee was changed and then her seat was changed.  
  
“Have you ever wondered about the trauma caused by that same woman on the other people she had accused in the past?  
  
“None has been proven so far. Do you even wonder about the trauma this caused to the 10th Senate and the image of the Senate with all these useless allegations? I have restrained myself from making a statement.  
  
“Look at these beautiful women. They have come across me so many times. Have I ever harassed any one of you? Or is the person thinking that you are not beautiful?”  
  
On Friday, Akpabio, while receiving a delegation of the Niger Delta Ethnic Nationalities Youth Leaders Forum who paid him a solidarity visit in Abuja, took a swipe at those he said are not well grounded in the rules of the Senate yet delight in “running uninformed commentaries” on the upper chamber.  
  
The Senate President, in a veiled response to the criticism that trailed Akpoti-Uduaghan’s suspension, said the Senate action was a unanimous one.  
  
He wondered why such critics did not bother to know why there was no dissenting voice in the Senate on the matter.  
  
“You should try to go and know the fact before you start running commentaries on television.  
  
“So we will advise members of the public to desist from running commentaries on things that they do not know, misquoting the rules of the Senate,” Akpabio said.  
  
Responding to an earlier comment by the leader of the delegation, Jonathan Lokpobiri Snr, that the first time Niger Delta was made a Senate President was 46 years ago, Akpabio said the people of Niger Delta would not toy with the position of Senate President no matter the mischief of others in the opposition.  
  
Akpabio said: “The Senate President of today is not representing himself alone. He is representing a people who are very crucial to the economic life of this country.  
  
“So when people gang up and conspire, I hear voices from Adamawa shouting, I hear voices from Kwara State shouting, I hear some young people from the Southwest being used for something they don’t know, they don’t know the rules of the Senate. You can’t be a herbalist and start quoting the Bible; you won’t know what to quote.  
  
“But you see people who are not well informed sitting down just like they do, like football commentators, and then they will say Ronaldo should have come from the left to score, and that if you were Messi, you would have kicked from the centre. Then you do commentaries on television.  
  
“But things that have to do with the hallowed chamber of the National Assembly, you cannot begin to quote what you have never seen.  
  
“It is only when you are elected to be a senator or a member of the House of Representatives, after your inauguration, the first thing that will be given to you is the Red Book.  
  
“That Red Book contains the Standing Orders that will maintain discipline and decorum and also show you step by step approach to lawmaking which you must study and follow.  
  
“In the House of Representatives, they will give you a Green Book to signify the Green Chamber.  
  
“But when people are not well informed about the procedures and begin to debate about the provisions they don’t know, sometimes it worries me.  
  
“So your concern about the current situation is well understood. We have our internal mechanism of settling issues, and this issue we have settled and we will continue to settle.”  
  
Jonathan Lokpobiri, President of the Ijaw Youth Council, who led the delegation, had earlier expressed concern about the development at the Senate and assured Akpabio of the support of the people of the Niger Delta.  
  
Lokpobiri also sought the intervention of the Senate President in the political crisis in Rivers State, warning that it could affect the entire Niger Delta if not nipped in the bud.  
  
He also raised concerns over the coastal road project, the Maritime University in Oron which is yet to take off and the possibility of extending the Warri-Itakpe rail line to Abuja.  
  
Senate denies suspending Natasha over sexual harassment claims  
  
The leadership of the Senate yesterday shed more light on the suspension of Senator Akpoti-Uduaghan, saying the action had nothing to do with the sexual harassment allegations she levelled against the Senate President.  
  
The Red Chamber said the suspension stemmed from her flagrant violation of Sections 6.1 and 6.2 of the Senate Standing Orders 2023 (As Amended) and her ‘unparliamentary’ behaviour during its plenaries and proceedings.  
  
Senate Leader Opeyemi Bamidele in a three-page statement alleged deliberate misinformation and false narratives by certain media organisations on the matter.  
  
He said: “It has come to the attention of the Senate that some media reports are attempting to falsely suggest that Akpoti-Uduaghan’s suspension was due to allegations of sexual harassment.  
  
“This is completely untrue, misleading and a calculated attempt to distort the facts.  
  
“If Akpoti-Uduaghan had strictly followed our guiding principles, the Senate would have treated her petition based on merit in line with its practice.  
  
“But she never obeyed the established practices of the institution where she was serving.”  
  
Bamidele said that Senator Akpoti-Uduaghan’s suspension was “a decision of the Committee of the Whole Senate, following the submission of a report by the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Ethics, Code of Conduct and Public Petitions.”  
  
He said that the report found Akpoti-Uduaghan liable for violating Sections 6.1 and 6.2 of the Senate Standing Orders 2023 (As Amended) and recommended her immediate suspension.  
  
As established in the findings of the Senate Committee on Ethics, Code of Conduct and Public Petitions, the statement pointed out that the disciplinary action was “a response to Akpoti-Uduaghan’s repeated violations of legislative decorum stated as follows:  
  
“Refusing to sit in her assigned seat during plenary on 25th February 2025, despite multiple pleas from the Minority Leader and other ranking Senators – an act of open defiance and disorderly conduct.  
  
“Speaking without being recognised by the presiding officer in clear violation of parliamentary practices and procedures on 25th February 2025.  
  
“Engaging in unruly and disruptive behaviour, obstructing the orderly conduct of Senate proceedings. Making abusive and disrespectful remarks against the leadership of the Senate.  
  
“Defying and refusing to comply with the summons of the Senate Committee on Ethics, Code of Conduct and Public Petitions mandated to investigate cases of misconduct.”  
  
Bamidele noted that the actions represented a direct challenge to the authority of the Senate and a violation of the Senate Standing Orders 2023 (As Amended) that govern the business of the Senate and the conduct of all its members without any exception.  
  
He insisted that the disciplinary measure was imperative, necessary and justified to restore order and uphold the integrity of the Senate as the country’s foremost democratic institution.  
  
“Contrary to the false claims being circulated, Akpoti-Uduaghan was not suspended for making any sexual harassment or for submitting a petition.  
  
“Her petition was rightfully discountenanced because it failed to meet the clear and established procedural requirements for submitting petitions to the Senate.  
  
“The rules of the Senate apply to all members without exception, and no petition—regardless of its subject—can be considered if it does not follow due process.  
  
“To suggest that her suspension was linked to her petition is not only a distortion of facts but an intentional and malicious attempt to mislead the public,” Bamidele said.  
  
While thanking some media organisations for their culture of objective reporting, he urged the media not to distort facts to suit a false narrative.  
  
He expressed dissatisfaction with an attempt to politicise a disciplinary action that was strictly based on clear violations of Senate Standing Orders 2023 (As Amended).  
  
He added: “This coordinated misinformation campaign is nothing more than an attempt to politicise a disciplinary action that was strictly based on clear violations of Senate Standing Orders 2023 (As Amended).  
  
“It is reckless, misleading, and a disservice to the people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, who deserve truthful and factual reporting. We, therefore, urge all foreign correspondents and responsible media houses to correct these misrepresentations and avoid propagating falsehoods that undermine the integrity of Nigeria’s legislative process.”  
  
We’re working to resolve the face-off, says Dickson  
  
The immediate past governor of Bayelsa State, Senator Seriake Dickson, and some opposition lawmakers on Friday visited Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan at her Abuja residence.  
  
Dickson, a member of the Senate Committee on Code of Conduct, Ethics, Privileges and Public Petitions, said he was not part of the meeting where decision to suspend Akpoti-Uduaghan was taken.  
  
He said he ‘heard more’ about the dispute during the visit to Akpoti-Uduaghan and would work to reconcile both parties.  
  
He said: “The public may recall that for the past three days, I was attending the three-day workshop on the Tax Reform Bills which started on Wednesday 5th of March and ended this evening, Friday 7th of March.  
  
“This is why I was not available yesterday to sit as a member of the Committee on Ethics, Code of Conduct, Privileges and Public Petitions in respect of the issues concerning our colleague Distinguished Senator Natasha Akpoti Uduaghan’s suspension, haven been assured by the Committee Chairman that the hearing would hold on Wednesday the 11th of March for which notices had already been issued.  
  
“I was not notified of the emergency seating yesterday. As a result of the strong views I had already canvassed, my colleagues and I were working on the Tax Reform Bills yesterday and as such was unable to join the plenary sitting which considered the report of the Ethics Committee that deliberated and approved the suspension.  
  
“This evening after concluding the retreat, I led a delegation of some senators of opposition parties on a visit to our colleague Senator Natasha and met with her and her husband at their home.  
  
“Senators as humans have their low and high moments and it is a tradition for Senators to support each other during these moments.  
  
“We offered words of encouragement, prayers and advice on a quick resolution of the issues surrounding her suspension.  
  
“Having heard more from her and her husband for the first time, I will discuss with other colleagues on how to intervene and engage with the leadership of the senate to resolve the issues as soon as possible.”  
  
APC youths: Natasha’s sexual allegation a distraction  
  
The National Youth Caucus of the All Progressives Congress (Akwa Ibom State Chapter) yesterday described the Senator Akpoti-Uduaghan sexual harassment allegation as a distraction to the Senate’s constitutional responsibility and Nigerians as a whole.  
  
The group, in a statement in Uyo, said distracting the Senate’s attention at this time was unnecessary.  
  
It said: “Those who seek redress must engage the institution through its established procedures, not through media grandstanding.  
  
“The Senate and Nigerians should not fall for this diversionary tactics. The Senate must stay focused, maintain order, and let’s move this nation forward.”