Natasha suspended for misconduct, not sexual assault allegation — Senate leader

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The Senate Leader, Bamidele Opeyemi, has clarified that Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan was suspended for gross misconduct, not because of a sexual harassment allegation she made against Senate President, Godswill Akpabio.  
  
Opeyemi made the disclosure in a statement that was made available to PUNCH Online on Saturday.  
  
The lawmaker representing Ekiti Central Senatorial District said false narratives are being circulated by certain media organisations on Akpoti-Uduaghan’s six-month suspension.  
  
The PUNCH reports that Akpoti-Uduaghan formally submitted a sexual harassment petition against Akpabio.  
  
The petition was submitted on the floor of the upper legislative chamber after the Senate resumed plenary.  
  
Following the submission, Akpabio denied harassing Akpoti-Uduaghan or any other female senator and urged Nigerians to avoid premature conclusions.  
  
The senators further suspended the lawmaker representing Kogi Central Senatorial District, stirring controversies among Nigerians.  
  
Reacting to the aftermath of the suspension, Opeyemi stressed that Akpoti-Uduaghan was suspended solely for her persistent acts of misconduct, blatant disregard for the provisions of the Senate Standing Orders 2023 and gross indiscipline.  
  
The statement read, “The Authority of the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria firmly rebuts the deliberate misinformation and false narratives being circulated by certain media organizations regarding the six-month suspension of Senator Natasha Akpoti Uduaghan.  
  
“Let it be unequivocally stated that Senator Uduaghan was suspended solely for her persistent acts of misconduct, blatant disregard for the provisions of the Senate Standing Orders 2023 (As Amended) and gross indiscipline—nothing more, nothing less.  
  
“It has come to the attention of the Senate that some media reports are attempting to falsely suggest that Senator Uduaghan’s suspension was due to allegations of sexual harassment.  
  
“This is completely untrue, misleading, and a calculated attempt to distort the facts. If Senator 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.”  
  
He further said that the Kogi lawmaker’s suspension was a decision of the committee of the whole Senate following the submission of a report by the chairman, Senate Committee on Ethics, Privileges, and Public Petitions, Senator Neda Imaseun, adding, “The report found her guilty of violating Sections 6.1 and 6.2 of the Senate Rules and recommended her immediate suspension.  
  
“The disciplinary action was a response to her repeated violations of legislative decorum, including: 1. 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.  
  
“2. Speaking without being recognised by the presiding officer in clear violation of parliamentary practices and procedures on 25th February 2025. 3. Engaging in unruly and disruptive behavior, obstructing the orderly conduct of Senate proceedings.  
  
“4. Making abusive and disrespectful remarks against the leadership of the Senate. 5. Defying and refusing to comply with the summons of the Senate Committee on Ethics and Privileges mandated to investigate cases of misconduct.  
  
“These actions represented a direct challenge to the Senate’s authority and a violation of Senate Standing Orders 2023 (As Amended), which govern the Senate’s business and the conduct of its members. The disciplinary measure was, therefore, necessary and justified to restore order and uphold the integrity of the Senate as the country’s foremost democratic institution.”  
  
Opeyemi urged the public and the media to disregard any false reports suggesting otherwise and to always seek the truth before spreading politically motivated narratives.