

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

Ref.: AL NGA 4/2025
(Please use this reference in your reply)

24 November 2025

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 59/20, 52/9 and 59/14.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning allegations of **sexual harassment, suspension from office, and punitive measures suffered by Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan, reportedly linked to her refusal of advances and intimidation by Senate official.**

Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan is a Nigerian politician and human rights advocate, serving as a Senator for Kogi Central in the 10th National Assembly since November 2023. She is a member of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and holds the distinction of being the first elected woman senator from Kogi State. In her role as a legislator, Senator Akpoti-Uduaghan has been an outspoken advocate for gender equality, transparency, and accountability in governance. She has also been involved in initiatives aimed at protecting and promoting the rights of women and marginalized communities within Nigerian society.

According to the information received:

In December 2024, Senator Akpoti-Uduaghan was allegedly a victim of sexual harassment by the Senate President. On 28 February 2025, she publicly spoke about the alleged incident on the media outlet "Arise News". These accusations surfaced shortly after a tense encounter in the Senate chamber. During a session, the Senate President directed the sergeants-at-arms to escort her out after she refused to move to a newly assigned seat, a reassignment that followed the defection of two opposition senators to the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC).

Senator Akpoti-Uduaghan was imposed a disciplinary measure for alleged 'misconduct' for refusing to change seats, including a six-month suspension from the Senate, leaving her without access to the privileges, immunities, and salary associated with her office.

On 2 March 2025, a public statement was issued declaring that the Senate could not investigate the allegations made against the Senate President. Subsequently, when she submitted a formal complaint of sexual harassment, the Senate Ethics

Committee dismissed it on procedural grounds.

On 4 July 2025, the Federal High Court in Abuja ruled that the six-month suspension of Senator Akpoti-Uduaghan from the Senate was unconstitutional, unlawful, and a violation of both her rights and those of her constituents. The court declared that the Senate's disciplinary powers cannot override constitutional provisions guaranteeing representation and ordered her immediate reinstatement. However, the Senate has reportedly declined to enforce the judgment, claiming it had not received the formal, certified court order. This refusal has raised serious concerns about disregard for judicial authority, the erosion of the rule of law, and selective accountability within Nigeria's legislative system.

It was reported that alongside the incident of alleged sexual harassment, there have been political moves, stigmatising public declarations and a public smear campaign against Ms. Akpoti-Uduaghan that have sought to minimize the seriousness of the allegations of sexual harassment.

Without wishing to prejudge the accuracy of the above-mentioned allegations, we are deeply concerned about the alleged acts of harassment, intimidation, public stigmatisation and political retaliation against Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan. These actions seem to suggest that she has been the target of institutional retaliation and gender-based discrimination as a direct result of her efforts to expose alleged sexual harassment and advance accountability within the Nigerian Senate as an elected woman serving in a public office. We also want to convey our serious worry that these activities could be in retaliation for her exercising her rights to freedom of expression and to participate in public affairs, and for her advocacy to advance women's rights and equality in political life and institutions. Her suspension from the Senate, reported targeted efforts to cast doubt on her character, and the absence of an impartial or independent investigation into her charges of sexual harassment all raise concerns about the lack of access to effective complaint and remedies mechanisms for victims. Senator Akpoti-Uduaghan has reportedly faced systematic hostility, victim-blaming narratives, and institutional impunity rather than protection and due process, which is deeply troubling.

Stigmatization, harassment, and outright attacks are often used to silence and discredit women who have been visible and active in society such as politicians, parliamentarians, journalists and human rights defenders. In the case of Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan, her reports of having experienced sexual harassment and the subsequent institutional retaliation, public vilification, and procedural harassment she has reportedly faced reflect these patterns. In her report on gendered disinformation, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression called on States to "reinvigorate their efforts to remove the structural and systemic barriers that impede gender equality and that reinforce discrimination, exclusion, prejudice and stereotypes that are being exploited by gendered disinformation campaigns" and recalled that "State officials and political leaders have a particular responsibility to set the tone of inclusive public discourse," as they "play a key role in shaping public debate and opinion and enjoy considerable latitude of political expression in international law" and therefore "should exercise that privilege responsibly and ethically to promote tolerance, not to feed hatred" (A/78/288, paras. 121 and 122).

We wish to remind your Excellency's Government about its obligation under the CEDAW Convention ratified by Nigeria on 13 June 1985 which includes obligations to take all appropriate measures to achieve the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women (article 5) and to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country (article 7).

We wish to bring your Excellency's Government attention to the 2024 report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, in which the Special Rapporteur emphasized the need for States to take reasonable steps to prevent, look into, prosecute, and offer remedies for all types of gender-based violence, including intimidation and harassment in institutional and political contexts. The Special Rapporteur urged States to make sure that any acts of retaliation or retribution against women who report sexual harassment or abuse are investigated and prosecuted as soon as possible, thoroughly, and effectively. The Special Rapporteur called on States to ensure that all women within their jurisdiction are protected and supported irrespective of their rank or position, are shielded from institutional reprisal, threats, harassment, and abuse, and that complainants have access to fair channels for protection and remedy ([A/HRC/56/48](#)).

We underscore the obligations of your Excellency's Government under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), particularly articles 3 and 19 acceded to by Nigeria on 29 July 1993. Under these provisions, States must ensure the equal enjoyment of all civil and political rights by women and men and must guarantee the right to freedom of expression without discrimination or fear of reprisal. These obligations include safeguarding women and girls from gender-based violence and harassment; refraining from committing, condoning, or permitting any acts of retaliation, intimidation, or institutional reprisal against those who report such abuse; and adopting effective measures to protect survivors from acts aimed at silencing or discouraging them. States must also ensure that all such acts are promptly and thoroughly investigated and that those responsible are held accountable, in accordance with international human rights law.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide information on the immediate steps taken by the National Assembly to comply with the Federal High Court decision of 4 July 2025 declaring the six-month suspension of Senator Akpoti-Uduaghan unlawful, and ordering measures to reinstate her and restore her full

rights as a parliamentarian.

3. Please give details on the National Assembly's internal complaint procedures for ethics and sexual harassment, including their independence and adherence to international norms for confidentiality, impartiality, and fairness.
4. Please describe the safeguards in place for complainants and whistleblowers in the legislature, particularly any actions taken to protect Senator Akpoti-Uduaghan from institutional retribution, harassment, intimidation, or retaliation for her accusations.
5. Please inform us whether the Nigerian Government or the National Assembly have expressed any concerns about the potential retaliation against Senator Akpoti-Uduaghan for reporting sexual harassment. Please indicate any measures taken to discourage and, if appropriate, sanction any acts of harassment, intimidation or public stigmatization against Senator Akpoti-Uduaghan, particularly those committed by public authorities.
6. Please provide information on any steps taken to implement technical reforms within the National Assembly, including:
 - Establishing an independent external mechanism to investigate harassment and ethics complaints involving senior members of the legislature.
 - Adopting clear non-retaliation policies and protections for complainants.
 - Ensuring that legislative rules and internal processes comply with constitutional protections and international human-rights obligations.
 - Conducting capacity-building initiatives to implement gender-sensitive complaint-handling, due process, mechanisms to protect women parliamentarians, and reparation measures for women having faced retaliation.

This communication and any response received from your Excellency's Government will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) within 60 days. They will also subsequently be made available in the usual report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person(s) responsible for the alleged violations.

In light of the allegations, we implore your Excellency's Government to take the required actions to investigate allegations, put an end to public harassments of women in political and public life, prevent their recurrences, and provide necessary support to Senator Akpoti-Uduaghan taking into account her safety, dignity, and political rights. Additionally, we urge the National Assembly and relevant Nigerian authorities to conduct fair, transparent, and timely investigations into the reported instances of harassment, intimidation, and retaliation she has faced. We also call for appropriate accountability measures and adequate protection for complainants and whistleblowers within legislative institutions.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Reem Alsalem

Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences

Irene Khan

Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

Claudia Flores

Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, we would like to refer to your Excellency's Government its legal obligations under the international treaties it has ratified and to broader international human rights standards.

I remind your Excellency's Government that, under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), ratified by Nigeria on 13 June 1985, States Parties are obligated to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women in all its forms (article 2). States must take all measures to ensure the full development and advancement of women (article 3) and to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women to eliminate prejudices and practices based on the inferiority or superiority of either sex (article 5(a)). Furthermore, CEDAW guarantees women, on equal terms with men, the right to participate in public and political life and to hold public office (article 7). I recall that, under general recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women, gender-based violence – including sexual harassment in political institutions – constitutes a form of discrimination within the meaning of article 1 of the Convention. The failure to prevent, investigate, and sanction such acts, or to protect women in political life from retaliation for reporting them, would therefore represent a serious breach of Nigeria's obligations under CEDAW.

Additionally, I would like to refer to the general recommendation No. 40 ([CEDAW/C/GC/40](#)) of the CEDAW Committee that maintains that women have the right to full, equal, and inclusive participation in all decision-making systems, including institutional, public, and political ones. It acknowledges that women's ability to successfully exercise their right is hampered by systemic hurdles such as harassment and intimidation. The claimed harassment, intimidation, and retribution against Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan in this case clearly prevent her from participating equally in her role as an elected official. Her individual rights as well as the CEDAW-guaranteed principle of gender equality in political representation are undercut by these experiences.

In addition, we would like to reiterate your Excellency's Government of its obligation under articles 3, 7, 9, 14, 17, 19, 21 and 26, read alone and in conjunction with article 2.3 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ([ICCPR](#)), which Nigeria acceded to on 29 July 1993. These provisions guarantee the right to equality before the law and protection from discrimination, freedom from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the right to liberty and security of person, the right to a fair and public hearing, the right to privacy and dignity, freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of peaceful assembly, and the right to an effective remedy.

Article 19 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to freedom of opinion and the right to freedom of expression, which includes the right "to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media". Freedom of expression can be restricted but any such

restriction must be compatible with the requirements set out in article 19(3) ICCPR. Under these requirements, restrictions must (i) be provided by law; (ii) pursue one of the legitimate aims for restriction, which are the respect of the rights or reputations of others and the protection of national security or of public order (*ordre public*), or of public health or morals; and (iii) be necessary and proportionate for those objectives. The State has the burden of proof to demonstrate that any such restrictions are compatible with the Covenant, and restrictions must always be “the least intrusive instrument among those which might achieve their protective function” (CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 34).

Article 20(2) ICCPR prescribes that any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law. Yet, this prohibition has a high threshold as it requires the fulfilment of three components: a) advocacy of hatred; b) advocacy which constitutes incitement and c) incitement likely to result in discrimination, hostility or violence (A/67/357, para. 43).

In her report on Gendered disinformation, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression called on States to “reinvigorate their efforts to remove the structural and systemic barriers that impede gender equality and that reinforce discrimination, exclusion, prejudice and stereotypes that are being exploited by gendered disinformation campaigns” and recalled that “State officials and political leaders have a particular responsibility to set the tone of inclusive public discourse,” as they “play a key role in shaping public debate and opinion and enjoy considerable latitude of political expression in international law” and therefore “should exercise that privilege responsibly and ethically to promote tolerance, not to feed hatred” (A/78/288, paras. 121 and 122).

In her report ([A/73/301](#)) on “Violence against Women in Politics” (2018), the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, analysed the phenomenon of gender-based violence faced by women in political and public life, including harassment, intimidation, and sexual abuse, as a means to silence and exclude them from decision-making spaces. The report noted that such acts constitute serious violations of women’s human rights and impede their equal participation in governance. The Special Rapporteur noted that women in politics face retaliation for speaking out against abuse. The Special Rapporteur called on States to adopt comprehensive legislation and institutional mechanisms to prevent and respond to violence against women in politics, including ensuring independent investigations, disciplinary accountability within political institutions, and protection for complainants from retaliation.

The Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls has called upon States to eliminate all forms of violence against women in order to fulfil women’s human rights and to improve the enabling conditions for women’s participation in political and public life ([A/HRC/23/50](#)). The Working Group has also underlined the increasing risk faced by women human rights defenders and women in public office of criminalization, arbitrary sanctions, or other forms of institutional retaliation because of their legitimate work. Women who work specifically to combat gender stereotypes or assert their rights, including through reporting sexual harassment, are particularly vulnerable to such reprisals. Certain institutional rules or laws, including procedural

regulations and internal parliamentary codes, may be instrumentalized to target women who speak out. The Working Group recommended that States eliminate any laws or policy measures, or institutional practices, that are used to criminalize or penalize women for exercising their rights or fulfilling their public duties ([A/HRC/41/33](#)).

I also would like to refer to the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993), which affirms that violence against women constitutes a violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Under articles 4(a), 4(c), and 4(d), States are required to pursue, by all appropriate means and without delay, a policy of eliminating violence against women; to exercise due diligence in preventing, investigating, and punishing acts of such violence; and to provide access to just and effective remedies for victims ([A/RES/48/104](#)).

I further draw attention to Nigeria's obligations under the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), ratified on 22 July 2005, particularly articles 2 and 9, which require States to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and to guarantee women's right to participate fully, equally, and safely in political and public life. Article 2 obliges States to adopt legislative, institutional, and policy measures to combat discrimination and to modify social and cultural patterns that perpetuate gender inequality, including within political institutions. Article 9 ensures women's equal access to political decision-making, mandating States to promote participatory governance and to protect women in leadership positions from all forms of intimidation or reprisal. The absence of an independent investigation, the apparent tolerance of harassment, and punitive measures against a sitting woman parliamentarian for exercising her rights undermine Nigeria's commitments under the Maputo Protocol and deter broader women's political participation. ([A.U. Doc. CAB/LEG/66.6, 2003](#)).

I also wish to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government the obligations of Nigeria under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), ratified on 22 June 1983, which enshrines key protections in articles 2, 3, 4, and 5. These provisions prohibit discrimination, guarantee equality before the law, safeguard the right to life and personal integrity, and protect human dignity. The reported actions may undermine the principles of accountability and non-discrimination embedded in the Charter and risk deterring women's participation in governance. ([OAU Doc. CAB/LEG/67/3 rev.5](#)).