



“There Is Enormous Suffering”

Serious Abuses Against Talibé Children in Senegal, 2017-2018

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“There Is Enormous Suffering”

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Map 1: Locations of Research in Senegal



Map 2: Talibé Migration Routes



Key migration routes of talibé children in Senegal. Many talibés travel to Senegal from neighboring countries, including Guinea-Bissau and Gambia. © 2010 John Emerson/Human Rights Watch

Terminology and Abbreviations

TERMINOLOGY	
Quranic students	
<i>Talibé</i>	A “disciple” or student of the Quran. <i>Talibés</i> can be adults or children of any age, but the vast majority in Senegal are boys between the ages of 5 and 15, particularly those living at residential <i>daaras</i> . Some <i>talibé</i> children live with family and attend Quranic schools during the day. Most female <i>talibés</i> are day students that do not live at the Quranic schools.
<i>Grand talibé</i>	An older <i>talibé</i> , typically age 17 and above, who often serves as the Quranic teacher’s assistant. Sometimes called a “young <i>marabout</i> .”
Quranic schools	
<i>Daara</i>	<p>Used interchangeably with “Quranic school” to refer to the traditional Muslim schools in which <i>talibé</i> children study and sometimes live. Many are lodged in teachers’ homes or in abandoned or unfinished buildings; some operate from newer buildings with classrooms. Depending on the facilities and <i>marabout</i>’s repute, <i>daaras</i> can host from less than a dozen to hundreds or thousands of <i>talibés</i>. Most <i>daaras</i> remain unregulated.</p> <p>Many Senegalese civil society activists and religious authorities routinely refer to the abusive and exploitative <i>daaras</i> as “so-called Quranic schools” or “self-proclaimed Quranic schools,” to distinguish them from the thousands of <i>daaras</i> where children do not beg and are well cared for by a Quranic teacher dedicated to their religious education. However, because the places present themselves as “Quranic schools”—and the children do spend some time learning the Quran, even if significantly less than they spend on the street begging—it remains the most appropriate terminology.</p>
<i>Daara internat</i>	A residential Quranic school, often providing lodging to <i>talibés</i> from other regions or countries. Many practice child begging.
<i>Daara externat</i>	A Quranic “day school” attended by children in the local community. These <i>daaras</i> generally do not practice child begging.
<i>Mixed daara</i>	Quranic schools that accept both external (day) and internal (boarding school) students. Some of these practice begging.
<i>Modern daara</i>	A Quranic school that meets health and safety standards set by the government, does not practice child begging, and often integrates additional subjects into its curriculum (French, math, sciences, etc.).

Quranic teachers	
<i>Marabout</i>	Used interchangeably with “Quranic teacher” in this report, reflected common parlance in Senegal, though it should be noted that some Quranic teachers do not consider themselves <i>marabouts</i> (which traditionally refers to Muslim leaders, teachers or holy men).
Community Volunteers	
<i>Ndeye daara</i>	A woman who serves as a community volunteer supporting a <i>daara</i> by providing food or other assistance to several <i>talibé</i> children.
Government Program	
<i>Retrait / Retrait de la rue</i>	Short for the Senegalese government program, launched in 2016, known in Senegal in French as <i>le retrait des enfants de la rue</i> (the “removal of children from the streets”).

ACRONYMS	
AEMO	“Non-Institutional Educational Action” agency (<i>Action éducative en milieu ouvert, AEMO</i>) – social services, child protection and legal assistance agency under the Directorate of Correctional Education and Social Protection in the Justice Ministry; AEMO services are installed in each regional or departmental court.
CDPE	Departmental Child Protection Committee (<i>Comité Départemental de Protection de l’Enfant</i>).
CPA	Center of First Reception (<i>Centre de Premier Accueil</i>) – state-run children’s shelter intended for emergency and short-term cases.
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
PPDH	The Platform for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (<i>la Plateforme pour la Promotion et la Protection des Droits Humains</i>) – Senegalese coalition of human rights and child protection groups.
WAN	West Africa Network for the Protection of Children – a transnational network of governments and non-governmental organizations, recognized by ECOWAS as the referral mechanism for the protection of children on the move in West Africa.

Summary

Dusty, dirty, and often-barefooted boys holding empty tomato cans or plastic bowls as they beg for money remain a common sight in Senegal’s capital, Dakar, and in many other cities across the country. Most of them are current or runaway *talibés* – Quranic students – sent to live and study at traditional Quranic schools known as *daaras*. Despite periodic moments of increased but inconsistent government attention to their plight, the number of *talibé* children subjected to forced begging and other serious abuses by their Quranic teachers remains staggering.

Based on existing data, Human Rights Watch estimates that more than 100,000 *talibés* living in residential *daaras* across Senegal are forced by their Quranic teachers, also known as *marabouts*, to beg daily for money, food, rice or sugar. Thousands of these children live in conditions of extreme squalor, denied sufficient food and medical care. Many are also subject to physical abuse amounting to inhuman and degrading treatment.

After fleeing his *daara* in 2018 to escape abuse, a 9-year-old *talibé* told Human Rights Watch: “The daily [begging] quota [set by the *marabout*] was 500 francs CFA [US\$0.90]... I didn’t like the *daara* because they hit us all the time – if we didn’t memorize the verses of the Quran, or if we didn’t bring money. At the *daara*, they beat you until you think you will die.”

Government officials have repeatedly pledged to address the problem over the years, including by rolling out two phases of a Dakar-focused program to “remove the children from the streets” in June 2016 and March 2018. However, these efforts have had limited impact, failing to reach the thousands of *talibés* begging in other regions across the country. Sustained commitment by the Senegalese authorities to stop the forced begging and abuse, ensure justice, and protect *talibés* has proven elusive.

This report documents scores of serious abuses committed against *talibé* children by Quranic teachers or their assistants in 2017 and 2018, including deaths, beatings, sexual abuse, chaining and imprisonment, and numerous forms of neglect and endangerment. The abuses took place in at least eight of Senegal’s 14 administrative regions (Dakar, Diourbel, Fatick, Kaolack, Louga, Saint-Louis,



Talibé children begging at car windows in Dakar, Senegal, June 19, 2018.
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Tambacounda, and Thiès); a Human Rights Watch researcher visited four of these regions: Dakar, Diourbel, Louga and Saint-Louis.

The report also documents forced begging, trafficking, and problems related to *talibé* migration, including illicit transport of groups of *talibés* across regions or country borders; cases of *talibés* abandoned by their *marabouts* or parents; and the hundreds of *talibés* who end up in the streets or in children’s shelters each year after fleeing abusive *daaras*. The report reveals the role of some parents in perpetuating these practices by turning a blind eye or returning children to abusive or exploitative *daaras*.

The findings in this report are based on 10 weeks of field research in Senegal between June 2018 and January 2019, phone interviews between May 2018 and May 2019, and information drawn from credible secondary sources including court documents and media reports. Human Rights Watch interviewed over 150 people, including 88 current and former

talibés, 23 Quranic teachers, and dozens of Senegalese social workers, child protection experts, activists, and government officials.

Building on five previous reports by Human Rights Watch documenting abuses against *talibé* children since 2009, this report demonstrates that severe abuses remain pervasive despite some government efforts to protect and assist *talibés* in 2017 and 2018.

Abuses in 2017 and 2018

Over the past two years, Human Rights Watch and a Senegalese coalition of human rights groups, the Platform for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (*la Plateforme pour la Promotion et la Protection des Droits Humains*, PPDH), observed hundreds of *talibé* children begging in numerous locations across the country, including the cities of Dakar, Diourbel, Louga, Touba and Saint-Louis. The children often begged in front of police and gendarmes, near government buildings, between moving cars and along busy highways. Some were as young as five years old, and many suffered from skin infections or malnutrition.

Sixty-three of the 88 *talibés* interviewed by Human Rights Watch said that their Quranic teacher required them to return with a quota of money each day, ranging from 100 to 1,250 francs CFA (\$0.20-\$2.20). One runaway *talibé*, approximately 11 or 12 years old, said that he was forced to beg for money – as well as all of his meals – by a Quranic teacher in Dakar. “The ‘payment’ was 500 francs CFA, and 550 CFA on Fridays [the Muslim holy day of worship],” he said. “If we didn’t bring it, the *marabout* whipped us with a cable. Once it injured me on my stomach.”

Human Rights Watch documented the deaths of 16 *talibé* children in 2017 and 2018 due to abuse, neglect or endangerment by Quranic teachers or their assistants. The incidents occurred in the regions of Saint-Louis, Diourbel and Thiès. The children, who were between the ages of 5 and 15, include three who died following severe beatings, four who died in two *daara* fires, five killed in traffic accidents while begging or avoiding return to the *daara*, and four who died from untreated illnesses. Nine of these deaths took place in 2018, including two as a result of beatings: one in the city of Touba (Diourbel region) in April 2018, and one in the town of Mpal (Saint-Louis region) in May 2018.



A *talibé* child begging at car windows in Dakar, June 19, 2018. Multiple *talibés* told Human Rights Watch that their Quranic teacher required them to return with a specific quota of money each day.

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Human Rights Watch also documented 61 cases of beatings or physical abuse against *talibés* in 2017 and 2018, 15 cases of actual or attempted rape or sexual abuse, and 14 cases of children imprisoned, tied or chained in *daaras*. These abuses were all allegedly committed by Quranic teachers or their assistants. Human Rights Watch and PPDH conducted field research in four of the eight regions where abuses were documented. Due to the frequent movement and migration of *talibés* – with some transported by parents or *marabouts* from one region to another, and some running away from abusive *daaras* – many *talibés* interviewed in one region had experienced abuse in another region.

In 43 of the documented abuse cases, children were beaten by *marabouts* or their assistants for failing to bring the requested sum of money after begging. Among the 14 cases of *talibés* restrained or imprisoned, many in cell-like rooms with bars or grating on the windows, some of the children were locked up for weeks or even months. “If we tried to

run away, the *marabout* would chain us by both legs so we couldn't move," said a 13-year-old *talibé* who escaped after being chained for three weeks in a *daara* in Touba.

Human Rights Watch also documented numerous cases of child neglect by Quranic teachers during field visits to 22 Quranic schools in Dakar, Diourbel, Louga and Saint-Louis regions. Multiple *daaras* housed from dozens to hundreds of *talibés* in conditions of extreme filth and squalor, often in unfinished buildings missing walls, floors or windows. Trash, sewage and flies clogged the ground and air, and children slept crammed dozens to a room or outside, often without mosquito nets. Dozens of *talibés* with visible infections or illnesses had not received medical treatment, and 13 *daaras* visited provided little to no food to the children, according to *talibé* children and Quranic teachers interviewed.

Justice and Government Efforts to Protect Talibés

Despite the continued abuse, neglect and exploitation suffered by many *talibé* children, by early 2019, the National Assembly had not yet passed the 2013 draft law – approved by the Council of Ministers in June 2018 – to establish legal standards for *daaras*, and officials rarely closed *daaras* that posed health and safety risks to children.

Senegalese President Macky Sall, re-elected in February 2019 to a second term, has previously stated his desire to end child begging and remove children from the streets. However, this rhetoric has not been accompanied by consistent, decisive and far-reaching action to protect *talibé* children subject to abuse and exploitation across the country. Government initiatives – such as social assistance projects for *talibés* and *daaras*, and the program to “remove children from the streets” in Dakar – have been limited in scale and inconsistent, with minimal impact. State child protection services across all regions are few and under-resourced.

According to local child protection experts, only a few communities managed to reduce the number of *talibés* begging in the streets since 2016, primarily due to efforts by civil society and local government. These include the Dakar municipalities of Médina and Gueule Tapée-Fass-Colobane, where mayors issued decrees in 2016 banning begging locally and requiring that *daaras* meet health and safety standards. With support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the mayor's offices worked in partnership with community members to

enforce the municipal decrees.

Though Senegal has strong domestic laws banning child abuse, endangerment, human trafficking and “the exploitation of begging” (detailed in Section I of this report), these laws were inconsistently enforced against abusive Quranic teachers in 2017 and 2018. Investigations and convictions for abuses remained limited, and charges were dropped or reduced by judges or public prosecutors in a number of cases.

“The Senegalese people are tired of the government advancing on this issue and then retreating,” said Mamadou Wane, president of PPDH. “Everyone knows there is enormous suffering in certain *daaras*. It’s time for the government to take concrete action to protect *talibé* children and end the abuse.”

Urgent Actions Needed

Given the scale and severity of the abuses documented in this report, the new Senegalese government should urgently commit to taking comprehensive measures to end the abuse, bring perpetrators to justice, strengthen child protection services, and inspect and regulate existing *daaras* nation-wide.

Anyone, including Quranic teachers, found to be forcing children to beg for money should face investigation and prosecution under Senegal’s 2005 anti-trafficking law. Any teacher who has beaten, chained, or otherwise physically or sexually abused the *talibés* in his care should also be prosecuted. Parents that intentionally send or return children to exploitative or abusive *daaras* should face legal penalties for knowingly exposing their children to abuse. When pursuing such legal remedies, authorities should consider what measures would be in the best interests of the child, including whether a relative or alternative appointed guardian is available to care for the child.

Government programs to reduce child begging should be expanded beyond Dakar to reach the thousands of *talibés* begging in other regions, and the government should make funding available to *daaras* that prioritize education and respect children’s rights. As part of its national child protection strategy, the government should strengthen its child protection mechanisms, including by providing adequate resources to children’s shelters and child protection services nationwide.

The government should also ensure that social workers and child protection committee members immediately notify the police or public prosecutor of cases of suspected *talibé* abuse, forced begging or neglect. This should include all cases where *talibé* children said they were beaten for failing to meet a begging quota; where a Quranic teacher failed to ensure timely medical treatment for a sick or injured child; and where *talibés* were injured or killed in a car accident while begging or in a *daara* fire while the *marabout* was absent.

Police officers in all regions should promptly conduct investigations into cases of suspected child abuse or exploitation by Quranic teachers, including by following up with social workers and visiting the *daaras* in question.

Finally, it is crucial that existing *daaras* be subject to regulation and inspections. Any *daaras* endangering children's health and safety should be reported to the mayor's office or prefecture, which should proactively inspect and close down such *daaras*, as was done in the Dakar municipalities of Médina and Gueule Tapée-Fass-Colobane. To implement national standards for *daara* operation – and, ideally, contribute to development of national policies on regulation and inspection – the National Assembly should urgently pass the draft law on the status of *daaras*.

Methodology

This report is based on research conducted in 2018 and 2019, including a two-week research mission to Senegal’s Dakar, Saint-Louis, and Diourbel administrative regions in June 2018; two months of research in Dakar, Diourbel, Louga and Saint-Louis regions in December 2018 and January 2019; and phone interviews and email correspondence with sources in the regions of Dakar, Saint-Louis, Diourbel, Louga, Thiès, Tambacounda, and Kaolack from May 2018 to May 2019. Cities visited by Human Rights Watch included Dakar, Saint-Louis, Diourbel, Touba, Mbacke, Louga and Koki. Members of *la Plateforme pour la Promotion et la Protection des Droits Humains* (PPDH) in Senegal helped arrange *daara* visits and facilitated interviews with Quranic teachers and local authorities in Diourbel, Louga and Saint-Louis regions.

Human Rights Watch interviewed more than 150 people in total, including 88 current and former *talibés*, of which 85 were children between the ages of 5 and 17 and three were young adults between the ages of 18 and 22. Others interviewed included 23 Quranic teachers and over 50 child protection experts, social workers, activists, United Nations representatives, and Senegalese government workers and officials in the ministries of Justice, the Interior, and Good Governance and Child Protection (restructured in early 2019 as the Ministry of Women, Family, Gender and Child Protection).

Information on several cases of abuse was obtained through interviews with social workers who had worked with the victims, from judicial records and other court documents, and from credible media reports. Many of the *talibés* interviewed in one region had fled a *daara* in another region where they reportedly experienced abuse.

Human Rights Watch visited a total of 22 Quranic schools and 13 children’s centers or shelters in four regions (Dakar, Saint-Louis, Diourbel, and Louga) from June 2018 to January 2019. Of the 22 Quranic schools, four were in Dakar, five in Diourbel, three in Saint-Louis, five in Touba, four in Louga, and one in Koki. Fifteen of these were traditional *daaras* practicing child begging, and seven were “modern” or “modernized” *daaras* (in accordance with the phrasing used in Senegal) that no longer practiced begging.

Of the 13 children’s centers or shelters visited, seven were in Dakar, four in Saint-Louis, one in Diourbel, and one in Louga. Two of these were day centers and 11 were short- or long-term shelters, including one privately-run orphanage and four government-run centers. Ten of the 11 shelters hosted *talibé* children at the time of visit.

Interviews were mostly conducted individually or in the presence of Senegalese civil society activists who knew and introduced the interviewees to Human Rights Watch. All in-depth interviews with *talibé* children in which experiences of abuse were discussed were conducted in children’s centers in the presence of social workers or staff members. Some very brief interviews were also conducted with *talibés* encountered in the streets, focusing on simple questions related to the children’s locality of origin and their experiences of migration, the location of their *daara*, and what they begged for each day. Interviews were conducted in French, Wolof and Pulaar. Those in Wolof and Pulaar were conducted with the assistance of interpreters, primarily social workers and child protection experts.

Human Rights Watch did not offer interviewees any incentive, and they were informed that they could end the interview at any time. Throughout the report, names and identifying information of some interviewees, including all current and former *talibés*, have been withheld to protect their privacy and safety. Some people spoke on the condition of anonymity, out of fear of reprisals.

This report builds on five previous Human Rights Watch reports. In 2010, *“Off the Backs of the Children”: Forced Begging and Other Abuses Against Talibés in Senegal* provided a more detailed account of the history of Quranic education in Senegal, the rise of exploitation and abuse in certain schools, and the experiences of young boys in such schools. Human Rights Watch published four subsequent reports in 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017. The 2017 report, *“I Still See The Talibés Begging”: Government Program to Protect Talibé Children in Senegal Falls Short*, analyzed the first phase of the largely unsuccessful government program to “remove children from the streets” in Dakar; it also documented ongoing abuses against *talibés* and child deaths in 2016 and early 2017. Abuse cases occurring in early 2017 that were documented in *“I Still See The Talibés Begging”* have been included in the 2017-2018 totals for this report.

I. Background and Legal Framework

In a centuries-old practice grounded in religious and cultural tradition, hundreds of thousands of children across West Africa are sent by their parents to study at Quranic schools. Known by different names in various countries, Quranic students are called *talibés* in Senegal, where the traditional Quranic schools are known as *daaras*.

While some Quranic schools in Senegal are attended only during the day (known as *daaras externats*) by children from the local community, thousands of others serve as boarding schools (*daaras internats*) hosting children from distant villages, towns, regions, or countries. Some “mixed” *daaras* accept both day and residential students. The vast majority of *talibés* living and studying at residential *daaras* are boys between the ages of 5 and 15, of which few receive any formal quality education beyond learning the Quran. Girls also attend *daaras*, but usually only as day students.

Talibé boys are often sent by parents or brought by Quranic teachers to live in *daaras* in major Senegalese cities such as Dakar, Saint-Louis or Touba, though many of these children originate from villages in other regions of Senegal, or from neighboring countries, particularly Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, and the Gambia. In a context of migration and poverty, boys frequently spend years without seeing family members, and some lose touch or are effectively abandoned.

Many Quranic teachers properly care for and respect the rights of the children in their care, ensuring that they do not beg. Some persist in sending children to beg for food, though they do not ask for money. However, many others have taken advantage of the unregulated system to exploit their *talibés* under pretext of teaching the Quran, forcing the children to beg for specific quotas of money each day.¹ Though the day schools typically do not practice begging, many of the residential *daaras* and some of the “mixed” *daaras* do.

¹ For more on the evolution of the practice of child begging among *daaras*, see Human Rights Watch, “Off the Backs of the Children”: Forced Begging and Other Abuses against *Talibés* in Senegal, April 15, 2010, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2010/04/15/back-children/forced-begging-and-other-abuses-against-talibes-senegal#>, p. 14-23.



A *talibé* child studies the Quran at a *daara* in Diourbel, Senegal, June 24, 2018.

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Beatings and other forms of abuse are also pervasive. Even among *daaras* that do not exploit children, corporal punishment, often referred to as “correction,” is frequently meted out by the marabouts or *grands talibés* – the older *talibés*, often age 17 and up, who serve as the teacher’s assistants.

Thousands of *daaras* operate without official oversight, many from teachers’ homes or in abandoned or unfinished buildings. Living conditions in traditional *daaras* are often cramped, filthy and unhygienic. Long hours on the streets begging put the boys at risk of car accidents, assault, and sexual abuse – all of which are regularly reported by the local media. Due to the lack of food and medical care at many *daaras*, *talibés* often suffer from both malnutrition and disease.

Over 100,000 Talibés Forced to Beg

The total number of *daaras* operating in Senegal is unknown, as is the number of *talibés*. There have not been any comprehensive national studies on this, nor are there official national figures available. Human Rights Watch previously estimated that at least 50,000 *talibés* were subjected to forced begging in Senegal.² However, as studies attempting to quantify the problem have slowly increased over the years, based on the figures from several recent regional and city-based studies (detailed below), Human Rights Watch estimates the number of *talibé* children forced to beg in Senegal to be over 100,000. This number refers only to *talibés* that are forced to beg for food or money; thousands more children attend Quranic schools that do not practice begging.

This figure draws on recent, but limited, studies and *daara* mappings carried out in several cities or administrative regions by the Senegalese government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). None of the studies measured levels of physical abuse, and most did not disaggregate between children forced to beg for food, money, or both.

In the Dakar region alone, a 2014 mapping by Senegal's National Anti-Trafficking Unit counted 1,006 Quranic schools and a total of 54,837 *talibés*, of which more than half (30,160 children) were forced to beg daily.³ A 2018 study by the US-based NGO Global Solidarity Initiative (GSI) counted 1,922 *daaras* and 183,385 *talibés* in Dakar, of which they reported that 515 *daaras* (26.8 percent) and 27,943 *talibés* (15.2 percent) practiced begging.⁴

² Human Rights Watch, *“Off The Backs of the Children”* (2010), p. 2; *“I Still See the Talibés Begging”: Government Program to Protect Talibé Children in Senegal Falls Short*, July 11, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/07/11/i-still-see-talibes-begging/government-program-protect-talibe-children-senegal#>, p.1.

³ Cellule Nationale de Lutte contre la Traite des Personnes (CNLTP), “Cartographie des écoles coraniques de la région de Dakar,” June 2014, <http://cnltp.org/rapport/cartographieaimprimerJuin%202014.pdf> (accessed March 27, 2019).

⁴ Global Solidarity Initiative (GSI), “Résultats de la Cartographie Géolocalisée des Daaras de Dakar,” 2018 (document on file with Human Rights Watch); see also: Global Solidarity Initiative, “Atelier de partage des résultats de la Cartographie géolocalisée des Daaras de Touba et de la Région de Dakar,” June 12, 2018, <http://www.globalsinitiative.org/en/2018/06/12/atelier-de-partage-des-resultats-de-la-cartographie-geolocalisee-des-daras-de-touba-et-de-la-region-de-dakar/> (accessed December 2, 2018).

In the religious city of Touba – Senegal’s second largest city, located in Diourbel region – GSI’s 2018 study found 1,524 *daaras* and 127,822 *talibés*, of which 1,016 *daaras* (66.7 percent) and 85,000 *talibés* (66.5 percent) reportedly practiced begging.⁵ During a visit to Touba in January 2019, officials informed Human Rights Watch that approximately 1,200 *daaras* were officially registered with the mayor’s office,⁶ but an education expert working for the mayor’s office estimated that more than twice that number of *daaras* existed in Touba, with thousands unregistered.⁷

In the northern city of Saint-Louis, a 2017 mapping by the respected children’s rights organization Maison de la Gare counted 197 *daaras* and 14,779 begging *talibés*.⁸

Thousands of *talibés* also beg in other regions across the country, particularly Louga, Diourbel, Thiès, Kaolack, and Kolda. In 2018, the National Federation of Associations of Quranic Schools, with over 700 member associations in 45 departments across Senegal, reportedly claimed to encompass over 16,000 *daaras* nationally.⁹



A painting on the wall of a children’s day center run by the NGO Enda Jeunesse Action in Dakar, June 21, 2018. The text reads, in French, “No to child begging.” © 2018 Enda Jeunesse Action – Centre de Jour

⁵ GSI, “Résultats de la Cartographie Géolocalisée des Daaras de Touba,” 2018 (document on file with Human Rights Watch); GSI, “Atelier de partage des résultats de la Cartographie géolocalisée des Daaras de Touba et de la Région de Dakar.”

⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with municipal council official in Touba, Senegal, January 10, 2019.

⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with education expert, Touba mayor’s office, Touba, Senegal, January 8, 2019.

⁸ Maison de la Gare, “14 779 enfants talibés mendiants à Saint-Louis,” March 2017, <http://www.mdgsl.com/actualites/mar201714779.html> (accessed December 1, 2018).

⁹ Manon Laplace, “Pourquoi le Sénégal veut encadrer les écoles coraniques,” *Jeune Afrique*, June 10, 2018, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/575577/societe/pourquoi-le-senegal-veut-encadrer-les-ecoles-coraniques/> (accessed November 20, 2018).

Laws Protecting Talibé Children

Senegal's commitments under international law obligate the government to protect children from violence, physical and sexual abuse, neglect, exploitation and human trafficking; to consider the best interests of the child; and to ensure a wide range of children's rights, including the rights to nutrition, health, medical care, and education; to a safe and nurturing living environment; and to live with family or those who care best for the child.¹⁰ Senegal has not adopted a Children's Code to bring the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child into national law.

Strong domestic laws in Senegal also ban child abuse and willful neglect, sexual abuse of children, unlawful imprisonment, endangerment, and human trafficking, including the "exploitation of forced begging." These are outlined below.

Child Abuse and Willful Neglect

Senegal's Penal Code states: "Anyone who intentionally beats or causes injury to a child of the age of 15 or younger, or who voluntarily deprived [him/her] of food or health care to the point of compromising [his/her] health, or who has committed against [the child] any other violence or assault, to the exclusion of minor violence, will be punishable by imprisonment of one to five years and a fine of 25,000 to 200,000 francs [US\$40 - \$340]."¹¹

If the violence or deprivation committed against a child led to mutilation, "permanent infirmities," or "caused death unintentionally," the law sets the penalty at 10 to 20 years of hard labor, raising it to hard labor for life if the perpetrator is someone "having authority over" the child. If the violence against the child was "habitual" and "led to death, even unintentionally, the sentence of hard labor for life will always be pronounced."¹²

¹⁰ See: UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (adopted 1989, entered into force 1990); Organization of African Unity (OAU), *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child* (adopted 1990, entered into force 1999); UN *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime* (2000); among others.

¹¹ République du Sénégal, "Code Pénal," Loi no. 65-60 du 21 juillet 1965, art. 298 (unofficial translation by Human Rights Watch).

¹² *Ibid*, art. 299 (unofficial translation by Human Rights Watch).

Rape and Sexual Abuse

Senegalese legislation does not specifically stipulate a minimum age for sexual consent.¹³ The country's Penal Code does not include a specific criminal offense for anyone who has sexual relations with children under 18. Most sexual offenses cover acts of sexual abuse of children under 16, with penalties generally maximized for abuses against children under 13.

Rape: Senegal's Penal Code narrowly defines rape as “any act of sexual penetration [of any kind] ... committed against a person through violence, coercion, threat or surprise.”¹⁴ Rape is punished with five to ten years imprisonment. Rape or attempted rape of a child age 13 or younger of age carries the maximum sentence.¹⁵

Sexual abuse: Molesting or attempting to molest a child under 13 years of age carries a sentence of two to five years imprisonment.¹⁶ The Penal Code also criminalizes “harassing others by using orders, gestures, threats, words, writings or restraints in order to obtain favors of a sexual nature by a person who abuses the authority conferred on him or her,” penalized by a fine and six months to three years in prison. If a victim is under 16, the maximum prison sentence (three years) is prescribed.¹⁷ Acts constituting “pedophilia” under Senegalese law – defined as “any gesture, touching, caressing, pornographic manipulation, use of images or sounds... for sexual purposes on a child under 16” – are penalized by five to ten years in prison.¹⁸

¹³ The Committee on the Rights of the Child has recommended that states introduce an acceptable minimum legal age for sexual consent. Committee on the Rights of the Child, “General comment No. 20 (2016) on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence,” CRC/C/GC/20, December 6, 2016, paras. 39 - 40.

¹⁴ République du Sénégal, “Code Pénal,” Loi no. 99-05 du 29 janvier 1999 modifiant certaines dispositions du Code pénal, art. 320 (unofficial translation by Human Rights Watch). Human Rights Watch believes states should expand the legal definition of rape to include “any physical invasion of a sexual nature without consent or under coercive circumstances.” A “physical invasion” occurs when there is a penetration, however slight, of any part of the body of the victim (or of the perpetrator by the victim) with a sexual organ, or of the anal or genital opening of the victim with any object or any other part of the body.”

¹⁵ République du Sénégal, “Code Pénal,” Loi no. 99-05 du 29 janvier 1999, art. 320 (unofficial translation by Human Rights Watch).

¹⁶ Ibid., art. 319 (unofficial translation by Human Rights Watch).

¹⁷ Ibid., art. 319 bis (unofficial translation by Human Rights Watch).

¹⁸ Ibid., art. 320 bis (unofficial translation by Human Rights Watch).

In cases where the acts or attempted acts of a sexual nature are perpetrated by an adult having “authority over the minor” or who is “responsible for their education,” the penalty is set at 10 years in prison.¹⁹

Unlawful Imprisonment

Under Senegal’s Penal Code, anyone who unlawfully “detains” or “sequesters” a person is subject to a penalty of 10-20 years of hard labor.²⁰

Endangerment

Senegal’s Penal Code states: “Anyone who exposes others to an immediate risk of death or injury of such a nature as to result in mutilation or permanent disability, by willful breach of a particular safety or security obligation imposed by law or regulation, is punishable by imprisonment from six months to three years and a fine of 250,000 francs to 1,000,000 francs [\$430 - \$1,700].”²¹

Human Trafficking and Exploitation

Under both international and Senegalese law, both the act of harboring *talibés* in a *daara* and exploiting them for money through forced begging, as well as the recruitment, transport or transfer of *talibé* children for this purpose, can constitute human trafficking.²²

The UN Trafficking Protocol defines human trafficking as:

...the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve

¹⁹ République du Sénégal, “Code Pénal,” Loi no. 65-60 du 21 juillet 1965, art. 321 (unofficial translation by Human Rights Watch).

²⁰ Ibid, art. 334 (unofficial translation by Human Rights Watch).

²¹ République du Sénégal, “Code Pénal,” Loi no. 2016-29 du 8 novembre 2016 modifiant la loi no. 65-60 du 21 juillet 1965 portant Code Pénal, art. 307 bis.

²² UN General Assembly, Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention on Transnational Organized Crime (“UN Trafficking Protocol”), adopted November 15, 2000, G.A. Res. 55/25, annex II, 55 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 49) at 60, U.N. Doc. A/45/49 (Vol.I) (2001), entered into force December 25, 2003, art. 3(a) and 3(c); République du Sénégal, Loi no. 2005-06 du 10 Mai 2005 relative à la lutte contre la traite des personnes et pratiques assimilées et à la protection des victimes, art. 1-4.

the consent of a person having control over another person, **for the purpose of exploitation**. Exploitation shall include... sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs... **The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered “trafficking in persons”** even if this does not involve any of the means set forth [above]...²³

Senegal, a party to the UN Trafficking Protocol, incorporated the definition nearly word-for-word in its 2005 national anti-trafficking law:

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, [or] receipt of persons by threat or recourse to violence, kidnapping, fraud, deception, abuse of authority or situation of vulnerability, or by offering or accepting payment of benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, [or] servitude is penalized by imprisonment of 5 to 10 years and a fine of 5 to 20 million francs [\$8,640 - \$34,500]. ...**The offense is constituted when the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt concerns a minor, even if none of the means listed [above] is used.**²⁴

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has stated that human trafficking encompasses that which “occurs both across borders and within a country (not just cross-border)” and “is for a range of exploitative purposes (not just sexual exploitation).”²⁵

Senegal’s anti-trafficking law also specifically criminalizes “the exploitation of begging”:

The exploitation of the begging of others: Whoever organizes the begging of another for profit, engages, lures or abducts a person to engage [him/her]

²³ UN Trafficking Protocol, art. 3(a) and 3(c).

²⁴ République du Sénégal, Loi n° 2005-06 du 10 Mai 2005 relative à la lutte contre la traite des personnes, art. 1 (unofficial translation by Human Rights Watch).

²⁵ UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), “Human Trafficking,” <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/what-is-human-trafficking.html> (accessed January 5, 2019).

in begging or to exert pressure on [him/her] to beg or continue to beg is penalized by imprisonment of two to five years and a fine of 500,000 to 2,000,000 francs (\$860 - \$3,440). The sentence shall not be suspended when the offense is committed against a minor ..., [against] several people, or involves the use of coercion, violence or deception against the person engaged in begging.²⁶

In cases where the children have been transported by Quranic teachers or their assistants across country borders in a “clandestine” manner without proper identification and authorization for each child, this is also be considered “migrant smuggling” under Senegal’s anti-trafficking law:

The smuggling of migrants: Penalized by 5 to 10 years’ imprisonment and a fine of 1,000,000 to 5,000,000 francs (\$1,730 - \$8,640) is clandestine migration organized by land, sea or air, where the national territory serves as zone of origin, transit or destination.²⁷

The gravity of human trafficking acts involving *talibés* is heightened under these laws by the fact that the victims are children and vulnerable, and further exacerbated in cases where violence and coercion is used by Quranic teachers or their assistants to enforce begging quotas. While investigations and prosecutions under the 2005 law of Quranic teachers accused of “exploitation of begging” or “child smuggling” have increased in recent years, such legal action remains rare.

²⁶ République du Sénégal, Loi n° 2005-06 du 10 Mai 2005 relative à la lutte contre la traite des personnes, art. 3 (unofficial translation by Human Rights Watch).

²⁷ Ibid, art. 4 (unofficial translation by Human Rights Watch).

II. Pervasive Forced Child Begging

From June 2018 to January 2019, Human Rights Watch and PPDH observed and spoke with scores of *talibés* begging on the streets of the cities of Dakar, Saint-Louis, Diourbel, Touba and Louga. Some were as young as four or five years old. Many suffered from malnutrition, scabies, skin infections, or other illnesses with symptoms such as coughing, discolored eyes, sores, or a swollen stomach. The children often begged directly in front of police and gendarmes, near government or police buildings, and along busy highways.

During two phases of a government program in Dakar known as “the initiative to remove children from the streets”²⁸ – the first from mid-2016 to mid-2017, and the second in 2018 – teams of police and social workers picked up over 1,800 children from the streets, including some 1,300 *talibés*.²⁹ However, as Human Rights Watch reported in July 2017, the program’s first phase returned over 1,000 *talibés* to the same Quranic teachers who had sent them begging in the first place.³⁰ While the second phase did not repeat the same mistake, ensuring children were returned to their parents, neither phase was accompanied by judicial investigations or prosecutions for forced child begging.³¹

Rolled out only in Dakar during its first two phases, the program failed to reach the tens of thousands of *talibé* children subject to forced begging in other regions. In Dakar, numerous social workers and child protection activists – particularly those at children’s shelters, which take in large numbers of children from the streets – told Human Rights Watch that they saw no decrease in the number of *talibés* begging since the program’s launch in 2016. “Nothing has evolved. Children are still in the streets,” said Alassane

²⁸ Ministry of Women, Family, and Children, “Etat des lieux des initiatives de lutte contre la mendicité des enfants talibés au Sénégal,” March 2017 (document on file with Human Rights Watch).

²⁹ Human Rights Watch, “*I Still See the Talibés Begging*”; and Agence de Presse Sénégalaise, “Sénégal: Plus de 1 700 enfants retirés des rues de Dakar en deux ans (tutelle),” *All Africa*, July 6, 2018, <https://fr.allafrica.com/stories/201807070066.html> (accessed March 29, 2019); Abdoul Baba, “Deuxième phase de retrait des enfants de la rue à Dakar : 339 mômes retirés des rues en trois mois,” *La Vie Sénégalaise*, July 10, 2018, <https://www.laviesenegalaise.com/deuxieme-phase-de-retrait-des-enfants-de-la-rue-a-dakar-339-momes-retires-des-rues-en-trois-mois> (accessed April 5, 2019).

³⁰ Human Rights Watch, “*I Still See the Talibés Begging*.”

³¹ Human Rights Watch interview with government official, former Ministry of Good Governance and Child Protection, June 21, 2018.

Diagne, coordinator of Empire des Enfants children’s center in Dakar.³²

Danielle Huèges, executive director of Unies Vers’elle Sénégal, which runs the Yakaaru Guneyi children’s center in Dakar, said: “On the airport road, in Yoff [a Dakar district], at the big intersections – there are so many children begging, in the most terrible condition.”³³

From June 2018 to January 2019, Human Rights Watch interviewed 88 current and former *talibés* in Dakar and Saint-Louis. Of these, 83 *talibés* were required to beg for food or money: 60 were observed begging in the streets, and 23, interviewed in children’s shelters, said they had been forced to beg at their former *daaras*. 63 *talibés* said that their Quranic teacher requested a specific sum of money each day, from 100 to 1,250 francs CFA (US\$0.20 - \$2.20).³⁴ One child in Saint-Louis noted that as the son of the *marabout*, he did not beg, but the other *talibés* at his *daara* begged for 150 francs CFA (\$0.30).³⁵

“Every morning we begged until 10 a.m., then we returned to study, and then we went to beg for the next meal,” said a 9-year-old Guinean *talibé* who had run away from his *daara* in Dakar. “The payment was 500 CFA (\$0.90). If you didn’t bring something back, they would beat you – the *marabout* or the older *talibés*.”³⁶

Another *talibé*, 8 years old and begging in the streets of Dakar, cited an even higher quota: “The *marabout* asks for 1,000 CFA (\$1.80). If we don’t find it, he beats us.”³⁷

³² Human Rights Watch interview with Alassane Diagne, coordinator, Empire des Enfants children’s center, Dakar, Senegal, June 18, 2018.

³³ Human Rights Watch interview with Danielle Huèges, executive director, Unies Vers’elle Sénégal, Dakar, Senegal, June 21, 2018.

³⁴ Human Rights Watch interviews with *talibé* children, Dakar and Saint-Louis, Senegal, June 2018, December 2018 and January 2019.

³⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with 8- or 9-year-old *talibé*, Saint-Louis, Senegal, June 28, 2018.

³⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with 9-year-old runaway *talibé*, Dakar, Senegal, June 21, 2018.

³⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with 8-year-old *talibé*, Dakar, Senegal, June 19, 2018.

In Dakar, social workers at the non-governmental organization (NGO) Enda Jeunesse Action’s Day Center for at-risk children told Human Rights Watch that they still regularly helped runaway *talibés* who were exploited by Quranic teachers. They noted that older *talibés*, as the Quranic teacher’s assistants, both enforce the *marabout’s* begging quota and sometimes force the younger children to beg for additional money. “The *marabout* might set a payment of 200 CFA (\$0.35), but the older *talibés* add another 300 CFA (\$0.50) that the child must find,” said El Hadji Malick Diop, the center facilitator. “The older *talibés* don’t beg anymore, but they have their needs, so they make the younger *talibés* bring them money,” said Modou Diop, the center manager.³⁸



Two *talibé* children in Louga hold their begging bowls, which contain rice. The children said they begged daily for food and money. January 11, 2019. © 2019 Lauren Seibert/Human Rights Watch

Human Rights Watch visited 22 Quranic schools in Dakar, Diourbel, Saint-Louis and Louga regions in June 2018 and January 2019. Seven were “modern” or “modernized” *daaras* that no longer practiced begging. Of the 15 traditional *daaras* that practiced begging, at least 13 required the children to beg for money. The *daaras* hosted children originating from at least nine different regions in Senegal and at least four neighboring countries (Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali).

“I wish they [the *talibés*] didn’t have to beg, because this increases the time it takes them to learn the Quran,” said a Quranic teacher in Diourbel whose *talibés* begged for their meals. “It should take them two years, but it can take them five years.”³⁹

³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with El Hadji Malick Diop and Modou Diop, facilitator and manager, Enda Jeunesse Action Centre de Jour, Pikine, Dakar, June 21, 2018.

³⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Quranic teacher in Diourbel, Senegal, June 24, 2018.

At least 10 of the *daaras* visited were supported mainly by begging, along with some donations and community sponsorships. The Quranic teachers at these *daaras* said they struggled financially, as none of the children’s parents contributed money toward the care of their child. Nevertheless, they claimed that they could not refuse to accept any *talibé* entrusted to them. It became evident in the interviews that some of them also continued to seek new *talibés* by periodically approaching parents in other regions and countries.⁴⁰

Whether a Quranic teacher uses the money from child begging for the *daara’s* expenses or uses it for his own enrichment – living with his family in a separate house while the *talibé* children live in squalor, as documented by Human Rights Watch in both 2017⁴¹ and 2018⁴² – or some combination of both, the motivation is irrelevant. The act of forcing children to beg for specific quotas of money qualifies as exploitation.

⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews with Quranic teachers in Dakar, Saint-Louis, Diourbel and Touba, June 2018 - January 2019.

⁴¹ See: Human Rights Watch, “*I Still See The Talibés Begging*,” 2017, p. 32-34.

⁴² Human Rights Watch interview with Quranic teacher in Dakar, Senegal, June 23, 2018.

III. Physical Abuse and Neglect

Beyond forced begging, Human Rights Watch documented dozens of cases of physical abuse committed against *talibé* children living in *daaras* in 2017 and 2018, usually for failing to meet the daily begging quota, failing to memorize the Quran, or trying to run away. The abusive punishments included beatings – which led to several *talibé* deaths – as well as withholding food and tying, chaining, or imprisoning children in *daaras*. These practices could amount to inhuman and degrading treatment.

Judicial officials and social workers in multiple regions told Human Rights Watch that they dealt with dozens of *talibé* abuse cases during this period. One social worker in Louga reported that he had assisted as many as 49 runaway *talibés* in 2018, all of whom he said had been forced to beg or had suffered beatings.⁴³

Human Rights Watch also documented cases of sexual abuse and rape of *talibé* children by Quranic teachers or their assistants, as well as by strangers or assailants in the streets, in 2017 and 2018. Additionally, many Quranic teachers failed to fulfill their responsibilities in regard to the health and safety of the *talibé* children in their care, which in some cases resulted in deaths.

Talibé Deaths in 2017-2018

Human Rights Watch documented the deaths of 16 *talibé* children in 2017 and 2018, all of which appeared to be the direct result of abuse, neglect or endangerment by Quranic teachers or their assistants. Nine deaths took place in 2018, including two cases where *talibés* died as a result of beatings, and seven deaths occurred in 2017, including one death caused by a beating.⁴⁴

The deaths were documented through analysis of court documents and interviews with witnesses or experts – social workers, judicial officials, and a doctor – who were directly involved with the cases or informed by trusted sources. Social workers from the “Non-

⁴³ Human Rights Watch interview with AEMO social worker, Louga region, Senegal, January 11, 2019.

⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch has documented a total of 39 *talibé* deaths due to abuse, neglect or endangerment by Quranic teachers since 2013, including nine children killed in a 2013 *daara* fire in Dakar, seven who died between 2014 and 2015, and 23 who died between 2015 and 2018. This figure includes the 16 cases documented in 2017 and 2018.

Institutional Educational Action” agency (*Action éducative en milieu ouvert*, AEMO) – a social services and legal assistance agency under the Justice Ministry – are mandated to handle urgent child protection cases in their localities; they are typically notified immediately of any serious incidents of child abuse, injury or death. Several cases were also reported in the local press.

Deaths Following Severe Beatings

Three *talibé* children died after being severely beaten by Quranic teachers or their assistants in 2017 and 2018. All three cases resulted in prosecutions and convictions, though the charges and sentences were reduced in each case from those initially sought by the prosecution.

In March 2017, a 10-year-old *talibé* died following a beating meted out by a Quranic teacher’s assistant (*grand talibê*) in Darou Salam, Diourbel region.⁴⁵ Initially prosecuted for “habitual assault and battery against a child under the age of 15, causing unintentional death,” the *grand talibê* was convicted in November 2017 for the lesser charge of “assault and battery causing unintentional death,” and sentenced to five years hard labor.⁴⁶

In April 2018, an 11-year-old *talibé* died following a severe beating in the city of Touba, in Diourbel region. “[The child] hadn’t mastered the Quranic verses... so the teacher began to ‘correct’ [beat] him with a stick,” explained a judicial official in Diourbel. “The *talibé* tried to get away, and he fell, hitting an iron post and injuring his head. He died before arriving at the hospital.” The teacher was arrested, tried and convicted for involuntary manslaughter – reduced from the original, more serious charge of “assault and battery causing unintentional death” – and sentenced to six months prison, according to the judicial official.⁴⁷

Another child, age 11, died after being beaten by his Quranic teacher in May 2018 in the town of Mpal, in Saint-Louis region. The teacher was arrested and prosecuted. Human

⁴⁵ This case was previously documented in: Human Rights Watch, “*I Still See The Talibés Begging*,” p. 27.

⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch email correspondence with Malick Sy, Diourbel regional coordinator, RADDHO, June 28, 2018; interviews with judicial official, Diourbel High Court, June 2017. See: “*I Still See the Talibés Begging*,” p. 27.

⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with judicial official, Diourbel High Court, Senegal, June 25, 2018, and email correspondence, June 29, 2018.

Rights Watch saw a photograph of the child’s body, which showed marks from the beating.⁴⁸ According to a Saint-Louis court document seen by Human Rights Watch, an autopsy confirmed the violent beating: “Examination of the body revealed several marks of cranial, facial, thoracic and abdominal bruises suggestive of multiple trauma.” A Saint-Louis judicial official told Human Rights Watch that the Quranic teacher said he suspected the *talibé* of stealing, and the child may also have failed in his studies. After the beating, the Quranic teacher “just left him there dying and went out,” the official said.⁴⁹

Though the Saint Louis public prosecutor had pressed charges of “assault and battery causing the unintentional death of a minor under the age of 15 by a person having authority over him,”⁵⁰ seeking a sentence of 20 years in prison, the Saint-Louis High Court ultimately reduced the charges, convicting the Quranic teacher, Cheikh Tidiane Lô, of “assault and battery causing unintentional death” in February 2019. He received a sentence of two years in prison.⁵¹ At time of writing, the prosecutor had appealed the ruling.⁵²

Deaths Caused by Neglect or Endangerment

Human Rights Watch documented 13 *talibé* deaths, seven in 2018 and six in 2017, that were allegedly the result of neglect or endangerment by Quranic teachers. This includes four children who died of injuries caused by being trapped in *daara* fires while the *marabouts* were away, five children killed in traffic accidents after they were sent out to beg or while avoiding return to the *daara*, and four who died from untreated illness. In some of the fires, several other *talibé* children also suffered burn injuries.

Deaths from Untreated Illnesses

In November 2018, five *talibés* fell ill with malaria in the Cité Niakh district of Saint-Louis while their *marabout* was away traveling. According to social workers and a judicial official,

⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with judicial official, Saint-Louis High Court, Senegal, June 28, 2018.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Saint-Louis Court of Appeals, Prosecutor’s Office, “Etat Traite des Personnes,” 2018 (on file with Human Rights Watch).

⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interview with judicial official, Saint-Louis High Court, Senegal, March 20, 2019. See also: Aminata Diouf, “Mort d’un talibé à Saint-Louis : 2 ans de prison pour le marabout Cheikh T. Lô,” *Press Afrik*, February 21, 2019, https://www.pressafrik.com/Mort-d-un-talibe-a-Saint-Louis-2-ans-de-prison-pour-le-marabout-Cheikh-T-Lo_a196464.html (accessed February 22, 2019).

⁵² Human Rights Watch interviews with judicial official, Saint-Louis High Court, Senegal, March 20, 2019 and June 5, 2019.



A *talibé* child sleeps on top of an improvised bed made of bricks at a *daara* in the city of Diourbel, June 24, 2018. At night, *talibé* children slept on mats on the sand, many without mosquito nets to protect them from malaria. © 2018 Lauren Seibert/Human Rights Watch

the children were not taken to the hospital in time, leading to the deaths of two children; the other three recovered at the hospital.⁵³ Issa Kouyaté, member of the Platform for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (PPDH) and director of the respected children’s rights organization and shelter Maison de la Gare (MDLG) in Saint-Louis, said that the Quranic teacher who owned the *daara* lived elsewhere with his family and frequently left the children in the care of an older *talibé*, as he did in this case. Kouyaté called it “negligence” and stated: “We have previously given materials to this *daara*, but if you go

⁵³ Human Rights Watch phone interview with Baye Modou Diop, coordinator, AEMO Saint-Louis, Senegal, December 27, 2018; interview with Issa Kouyaté, director of the Maison de la Gare children’s center in Saint-Louis, December 11, 2018; interview with judicial official, Saint-Louis High Court, Senegal, December 26, 2018. See also: “Mort de deux talibés à CITÉ NIAKH : Ce que révèlent les analyses,” *Senegal7*, November 23, 2018, <https://www.senegal7.com/mort-de-deux-talibes-a-cite-niakh-ce-que-revelent-les-analyses/> (accessed November 26, 2018); “Drame – Décès de deux talibés : la thèse du Paludisme avancée,” *MetroDakar*, November 22, 2018, <https://www.metrodakar.net/societe/drame-deces-de-deux-talibes-la-these-du-paludisme-avancee/> (accessed November 26, 2018).

there you'll never see them. Everything we give to the *marabout* for the children he takes to his own house, for his own family, and the *talibés* live in this abandoned building, where there is water on the ground.”⁵⁴

A YouTube video posted on November 22, 2018, the day after the two children's deaths, apparently shows the squalor in which they lived: crumbling walls, rubble on the ground, and no roof in places – leaving the children easily exposed to mosquitos and disease.⁵⁵ Prosecution of the Quranic teacher and his assistant for endangerment and involuntary manslaughter was ongoing at time of writing.⁵⁶

In a separate incident in Saint-Louis in November 2018, two *talibé* children who had been living in a *daara* in Pikine district died, one from severe malaria and the other from a tetanus infection following a ritual circumcision in October, after the Quranic teacher allegedly failed to ensure they received timely medical treatment. The children were reportedly between the ages of 9 and 12.⁵⁷ Kouyaté, whose organization (MDLG) had partnered with a local association of doctors to provide medical assistance to children from this *daara*, recounted:

This is due to the carelessness of the *marabout*... From this *daara*, some 35 children were circumcised. After it was done, this *marabout* sent a few of the *talibés* to the [MDLG] center for medical treatment. But we didn't know that there were others who still hadn't been treated. One of the children at the *daara*, his wound got infected with tetanus. He had terrible problems, and finally he died at the hospital... That's when the medical team found out that some of the other *talibés* still had not received any medical treatment... This is both negligence and exploitation – not only were the children not treated, but they continued to go out begging. It's worse than terrible.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Issa Kouyaté, director of the Maison de la Gare children's center in Saint-Louis, December 11, 2018.

⁵⁵ Ndar Buzz, “Décès de Deux Talibés à Cite Niakh DE SL,” YouTube video, November 22, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ckg3nJ03Kqo> (accessed December 11, 2018).

⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interviews with judicial official, Saint-Louis High Court, Senegal, March 20, 2019 and June 5, 2019.

⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interviews with Issa Kouyaté, director, Maison de la Gare, Saint-Louis, Senegal, December 20 and 26, 2018; interview with private practice doctor, Saint-Louis, Senegal, January 15, 2019.

⁵⁸ HRW interviews with Issa Kouyaté, director, Maison de la Gare, Saint-Louis, Senegal, December 20, 2018.

According to a private practice doctor in Saint-Louis, who had helped provide medical assistance to this *daara*, the second child died shortly after the first: originally the medical team thought this child had a tetanus infection as well, but it turned out to be severe malaria, the doctor explained. When he had visited the *daara* to provide medical care to the remaining *talibés*, “Their bandages weren’t clean – I don’t know how long they went without treatment,” the doctor said. “Normally [after a circumcision], the *marabouts* tell the children to go get medical treatment before they go out begging or do anything else. When the *marabout* gives this order, some children come [to get treatment], but others maybe are afraid and don’t come... and every time, it’s the children that come on their own... The *marabout* doesn’t provide transportation money.” In this case, the Quranic teacher had apparently not verified whether his *talibés* had gone to get treatment, according to the doctor.⁵⁹ At time of writing, the Quranic teacher was still operating his *daara*.⁶⁰

Children Trapped in Daara Fires: Deaths and Injuries

Beyond the health risks posed to the children, some *daaras* are so poorly constructed and poorly supervised that they put *talibés* at high risk of death or injury in fires. Since the 2013 fire that killed nine children trapped in a Dakar *daara*,⁶¹ several other fires have broken out in *daaras* across the country. From mid-2017 to the end of 2018, at least four *daaras* in different regions caught fire, with all but one fire causing injuries to the children. Two fires were fatal, resulting in the deaths of four *talibé* children in total.

In June 2017, a 7-year old *talibé* reportedly dropped a lit match and set a *daara* in Thiès alight, leading to his death.⁶² A former government social worker in Thiès told Human Rights Watch that the Quranic teacher was absent from the *daara* when it caught fire. “It was a problem of negligence,” the social worker said. “The *marabouts* need to be more vigilant; they shouldn’t just take the oldest *talibés* and give them the responsibility of managing the *daara*. As the one in charge, the *marabout* should himself take care of the

⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with private practice doctor, Saint-Louis, Senegal, January 15, 2019.

⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Issa Kouyaté, director, Maison de la Gare, Saint-Louis, Senegal, March 10, 2019 and June 3, 2019.

⁶¹ Human Rights Watch, *Exploitation in the Name of Education: Uneven Progress in Ending Forced Child Begging in Senegal*, March 19, 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/03/19/exploitation-name-education/uneven-progress-ending-forced-child-begging-senegal>.

⁶² Human Rights Watch interview with former government social worker, Thiès, Senegal, December 11, 2018. See also: “Thiès : Un talibé meurt calciné dans son internat,” June 13, 2017, *Setal.net*, http://www.setal.net/Thies-Un-talibe-meurt-calcine-dans-son-internat_a56334.html (accessed December 9, 2018).

children, look out for them and see how they are living, ensure he fulfills his responsibility.”⁶³

In December 2017, a *daara* caught fire in the town of Mbour, Thiès region, killing three *talibés* reportedly between the ages of 7 and 12.⁶⁴ The Quranic teacher was away from the *daara* when it caught fire. A government social worker in Mbour described what happened:

The *marabout* had left for the village... He had asked another *marabout* in the same neighborhood to look after the children... The other *marabout* said he passed by the *daara* to tell the children to put out the candles, but he didn't return to check on them again... the room caught fire, and the children could not escape. The neighbors were alerted by the children's screams, and they tried to help... Two children died at the scene, and a third died later at the hospital – he had third degree burns.⁶⁵

Ndèye Ramatoulaye Gueye Diop, Minister of Good Governance and Child Protection at the time, reportedly visited the scene after the Mbour *daara* fire and called on Quranic teachers to better manage their *daaras*. She also appealed to the general population, including parents of *talibés*, to improve the living conditions for *talibé* children.⁶⁶

In 2018, at least two other *daaras* caught fire with no fatalities. In February, local press reported that a fire broke out in a *daara* housing about 30 *talibé* children in Dakar's Ouest-Foire neighborhood, with two children suffering minor injuries.⁶⁷ In July, a *daara* in the city of Diourbel caught fire after a bottle of gas exploded. While no one was reportedly injured, there was extensive material damage.⁶⁸

⁶³ Human Rights Watch interview with government social worker, Thiès, Senegal, December 11, 2018.

⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with government social worker, Mbour, Senegal, December 12, 2018. See also: “INCENDIE – Talibés décédés à Mbour : Le ministre de la Famille plaide pour des *daara* sains,” *Le Quotidien*, December 26, 2017, <http://www.lequotidien.sn/incendie-talibes-decedes-a-mbour-le-ministre-de-la-famille-plaide-pour-des-daara-sains/> (accessed December 9, 2018).

⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch interviews with government social worker, Mbour, Senegal, December 12, 2018 and January 25, 2019.

⁶⁶ “Incendie – Talibés décédés à Mbour : Le ministre de la Famille plaide pour des *daara* sains,” *Le Quotidien*, December 26, 2017, <http://www.lequotidien.sn/incendie-talibes-decedes-a-mbour-le-ministre-de-la-famille-plaide-pour-des-daara-sains/> (accessed December 9, 2018).

⁶⁷ “Ouest-Foire: incendie dans un ‘*daara*’ regroupant une trentaine de talibés,” February 24, 2017, *Senegal Direct*, <https://www.senegaldirect.net/ouest-foire-incendie-daara-regroupant-trentaine-de-talibes/> (accessed December 10, 2018).

⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Malick Ciré Sy, Diourbel regional coordinator, RADDHO, Diourbel, Senegal, July 15, 2018.



Left: Neighbors attempt to put out a fire at a *daara* in Diourbel, July 14, 2018. While no one was reportedly injured, there was extensive material damage. **Right:** Attempts to salvage burned materials, including religious texts, from the *daara* fire in Diourbel, July 14, 2018. © 2018 Malick Sy

Talibé Deaths and Injuries as a Result of Exposure to Traffic

Human Rights Watch documented the deaths of at least five *talibé* children in traffic accidents in 2017 and 2018, as well as another accident seriously injuring a *talibé* in January 2019. The deaths appeared to be a result of the children’s exposure during long hours of forced begging in the streets. All five deaths were documented through interviews with witnesses or local social workers.

Two additional traffic accidents involving *talibé* children – a March 2018 accident in Dakar,⁶⁹ and a fatal July 2018 accident in Touba⁷⁰ – were reported by the media, but Human Rights Watch was unable to verify these incidents.

⁶⁹ See: “Accident aux Parcelles assainies U26 : un talibé renversé par une moto,” *SeneNews*, March 15, 2018, https://www.senenews.com/actualites/accident-aux-parcelles-assainies-u26-un-talibe-renverse-par-une-moto_224408.html (accessed January 4, 2019).

In 2018 and early 2019, Human Rights Watch researchers observed dozens of children, some who appeared as young as four or five, darting out onto busy roads and weaving between cars at street intersections. The danger is exacerbated for children who linger or spend the night in the streets when they have failed to collect enough money for delivery to the *marabout*, avoiding return to a *daara* where they will likely suffer abuse for failing to meet the quota.

In April 2017, a young *talibé* of around 6 or 7 years old was hit by a bus and killed in the Pikine district of Saint-Louis, according to MDLG director Issa Kouyaté, who was contacted after the incident by witnesses. He recounted what the witnesses told him:

A group of *talibés* had finished begging around noon and were crossing the street when a bus hit one of the *talibés* – it ran over his head, which was completely crushed. They had to bury him the same day. It was so difficult for the other *talibés*... they were very upset.⁷¹

In November 2017, a 4x4 vehicle hit a young *talibé*, around 5-7 years old, in front of a gendarmerie building in Mbour.⁷² An government social worker in Mbour, who had been informed of the accident by the child's *ndeye daara* (a woman who helps support the needs of *talibés* in her community), told Human Rights Watch:

This child died at the hospital... The *ndeye daara* said the child was out on his own in the street... These cases are so recurrent in Mbour, *talibés* hit by cars. I always say, and I maintain this position: the place of a *talibé* child is not in the street... If abuse occurs in the *daara*, *talibés* often prefer to stay in the street rather than return to a *daara* where they are always beaten, mistreated, with no freedom, no rights... at least in the street there is solidarity with other children, and someone might give them something to eat... Honestly, it's either the living conditions in the *daara* that explain the

⁷⁰ Ousmane Samb, "Touba: Un Taxi Macké-Touba dérape et tue un talibé," *Senegal7*, July 7, 2018, <http://www.senegal7.com/touba-un-taxi-macke-touba-derape-et-tue-un-talibe/> (accessed January 4, 2019).

⁷¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Issa Kouyaté, director, Maison de la Gare, Saint-Louis, Senegal, June 2017.

⁷² See: Cheikh Adama Gueye, "Mbour: Accident mortel très triste à la sortie de Mbour," *SenepPeople*, November 11, 2017, <https://seneppeople.com/2017/11/11/mbour-accident-mortel-tres-triste-a-sortie-de-mbour/> (accessed January 4, 2019).

child's presence in the street, or it's the *marabout* who sends him out and exploits the begging.⁷³

The social worker told Human Rights Watch about another accident in March 2018, also reported in the local press, when a bus hit a 5-year-old *talibé* in the streets of Mbour around 6 a.m.⁷⁴ “Either he had stayed in the street [overnight], or he was sent there to beg,” she said. “It’s due to neglect by the *marabout* that the child was a victim... he was entrusted to an adult who should take care of him and ensure his protection.”⁷⁵

On November 19, 2018, a *talibé* child was hit by a car while he was begging and killed in Tivaouane, Thiès region, according to a runaway *talibé* from the same *daara* interviewed by Human Rights Watch, as well as a member of the Tivaouane Departmental Child Protection Committee who investigated the incident.⁷⁶ The *talibé* who reported the incident also said that he and the other children had been forced to beg for 250 francs CFA (US\$0.40) per day and beaten while he lived at this *daara*.⁷⁷

The final *talibé* death documented by Human Rights Watch occurred in Saint-Louis in December 2018, according to an eyewitness, who told Human Rights Watch: “The child was resting outside around noon or 1 p.m. under the iron fence of the garden, next to the river [near a busy traffic circle]... A driver lost control of her car and ran over the fence, and the child was under the car... I saw everything. For three days after that, I couldn’t sleep – it really shocked me.” The witness explained that when he went to visit the victim’s *daara*, the child’s brother – another *talibé* – told him that the *marabout* asked for 250 CFA daily (\$0.40), which the children collected by begging or doing odd jobs in the market; the child said his brother had been resting in the garden after collecting money. “These *marabouts*, each morning they send *talibés* to get money. If they don’t get the required amount, they

⁷³ Human Rights Watch interview with government social worker, Mbour, Senegal, December 12, 2018.

⁷⁴ Ibid; Ousmane Demba Kane, “Encore un drame à Mbour : un bus fauche mortellement un talibé,” *PressAfrik*, March 22, 2018, https://www.pressafrik.com/Encore-un-drame-a-Mbour-un-bus-fauche-mortellement-un-talibe_a180167.html (accessed January 4, 2019); “Accident à Mbour : Un talibé de 5 ans mortellement fauché par un bus,” *SeneNews*, March 22, 2018, https://www.senenews.com/actualites/accident-a-mbour-un-talibe-de-5-ans-mortellement-fauche-par-un-bus_225399.html (accessed January 4, 2019).

⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with government social worker, Mbour, Senegal, December 12, 2018.

⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with 10 or 11-year-old runaway *talibé*, Dakar, Senegal, January 3, 2019; interview with member of the Departmental Child Protection Committee in Tivaouane, Senegal, January 17, 2019.

⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with 10 or 11-year-old runaway *talibé*, Dakar, Senegal, January 3, 2019.



Left: The scene of an accident in Louga, January 13, 2019, in which a motorcycle hit a *talibé* child in the streets. **Right:** A *talibé* child reveals his untreated hand injury, holding a begging bowl in his other hand. The child attended the same Quranic school in Louga the victim of the motorcycle accident.

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are obliged to stay outside – in the garden, near the river, in dangerous areas,” the witness said.⁷⁸

On January 13, 2019, Human Rights Watch and PPDH arrived at the scene of an accident in Louga shortly after a *talibé* of around 11 years old was hit by a motorcycle. The child was lying on the street, sobbing and holding his leg, which appeared to be broken. Another *talibé* from the same *daara* – who had witnessed the accident – said that the children had to bring 250 francs CFA to the *marabout* each day.⁷⁹ The *talibé* witness had an infected, untreated wound on his hand. After the victim was taken to the hospital, Human Rights Watch and PPDH found the Quranic teacher asleep in his *daara*, at around 10:30 a.m., while all his *talibés* were out begging in the streets. The teacher explained that he had around 20 *talibés* at his *daara*, all from villages in Louga region.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch interviews with witness, Saint-Louis, Senegal, January 14-21, 2019.

⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with *talibé* witness, Louga, Senegal, January 13, 2019.

⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Quranic teacher, Louga, Senegal, January 13, 2019.

Beatings

Human Rights Watch documented 61 cases of *talibé* children allegedly beaten by Quranic teachers or their assistants in 2017 and 2018, according to interviews with *talibé* victims, social workers and staff at children’s centers. The beatings occurred in regions across Senegal, and particularly in Dakar, Saint-Louis, Diourbel, Louga, and Thiès regions.⁸¹

Of the 61 cases, 43 *talibés* were allegedly beaten for failing to meet the money quota and 18 for other transgressions, including failing in their lessons or trying to run away. The children described being beaten with sticks or with whips constructed from wires, cords, cables, or rubber strips from car engine belts. Human Rights Watch observed scars, welts or open wounds on seven of the children who reported abuse.⁸²

In many cases, the children said the *marabout* himself administered the punishment. In other cases, children said that the *marabout’s* assistants (*grands talibés*) – meted out the beatings, either in the presence of the *marabout* or in his absence. A 12-year-old runaway *talibé*, who had been brought by his aunt from Gambia to Kolda (a town in southern Senegal) and then brought by his Quranic teacher from Kolda to Dakar, told Human Rights Watch:

The payment was 400 CFA (\$0.70) for regular days, and 500 CFA (\$0.90) on Friday [the Muslim holy day of worship]. If we didn't bring the money, the older *talibés* would beat us with an electric cable... I don't know what the *marabout* used the money for. When you go to beg, there is an hour you have to return to the *daara*. If you come late, they hit you. If you don't bring the payment, they hit you. And if you don't succeed at reciting the verses, they hit you.⁸³

Several *talibés* described being subjected to a method of punishment known as “taking by four” (*prendre par quatre*) – during which at least two older *talibés* restrain the child’s

⁸¹ Eleven of these cases were previously documented in a July 2017 Human Rights Watch report; Human Rights Watch, “*I Still See The Talibés Begging*,” p. 27-29.

⁸² Two of these cases were previously documented in “*I Still See The Talibés Begging*,” p. 27-29.

⁸³ Human Rights Watch interview with 12-year-old runaway *talibé*, Dakar, Senegal, June 19, 2018.

limbs as he is beaten.⁸⁴ A former *talibé* of around 15 or 16 years old described the abuse he had experienced for years at a *daara* in Touba before finally running away in 2017:

At the beginning there were around 50 *talibés* at the *daara*, but by the time I left there were a lot less, because many ran away... If we went out to beg, the *marabout* asked for 500 CFA (\$0.90), rice, coffee and sugar. If we returned to the *daara* without bringing the money, the *marabout* himself or the older *talibés* would beat us. They took the whip to hit us, and they would take us *par quatre* – two would hold our arms and others would hold our legs, while they beat us. I was injured several times – I have scars from these beatings... During lessons, if you didn't learn well, they [the *marabout* or *grands talibés*] would beat us harshly... that's why some *talibés* ran away, they couldn't handle the beatings.

...They also used to force us to kneel and face the wall, on the rocks and pieces of bricks, and this injured our knees. Because of having to do this so often, I had scars... sometimes we would get up after the *marabout* left, but if he returned we would run back into position so he wouldn't see us.⁸⁵

A 13-year-old *talibé* who had run away from his *daara* in Touba, interviewed at a children's center in Dakar, said:

If the *grand marabout* wasn't there, the older *talibés* mistreated us... they made us beg each day. If you didn't have the daily payment of 500 CFA (\$0.90), they would take you *par quatre* and beat you on your back. During the week we would give the money to the oldest ones in the *daara*, who would add up all the money and give the sum to the *marabout* on Saturday. I don't know what he did with the money.⁸⁶

A social coordinator working at a children's center run by a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Dakar told Human Rights Watch:

⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch interviews with runaway *talibé* children in Dakar, Senegal, June 2018 and January 2019.

⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with 15 or 16-year-old runaway *talibé*, Dakar, Senegal, June 26, 2018.

⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with 13-year-old runaway *talibé*, Dakar, Senegal, June 19, 2018.

There is a *daara* in Keur Massar [a municipality of Dakar] that we have received a lot of *talibés* from. The children beg seven out of seven days a week. They give 700 CFA (\$1.25) per *talibé* every day, and on Friday it's 1,000 CFA (\$1.80). The *marabout* is never there – he's always in Kolda. He comes here [to Dakar] just to get money, and returns to the village. The children are often abused by the older *talibés* – they beat them with rubber strips from car engine belts. Last year we received many children from this *daara*, maybe five or six. So far this year [as of June 2018], we received two.⁸⁷

Two cases of abuse were described to Human Rights Watch by AEMO social workers in Diourbel and Louga regions. In Mbacke, in January 2017, “Two *talibés* were victims of severe abuse by the *marabout*... one [age 10] was sent to the health center for treatment, because he was very injured from a beating, and the other [age 11] had cuffs on his feet – the police had to remove them,” said an AEMO social worker.⁸⁸

In Louga, an AEMO social worker said that he had assisted two *talibés* around the ages of 11 and 12 in November 2018 who said they had been beaten and locked up in their *daara* in Louga region. The youngest had scars all over his legs that may have been from beatings, the social worker said.⁸⁹

In Dakar, a child protection agent at the government-run Center of First Reception (*Centre de Premier Accueil*, CPA) said that it was common for *talibé* children at the shelter to have suffered abuse.⁹⁰ She recounted two cases from 2017:

In November or December 2017, we had one case of a *talibé*, about 7 or 8 years old, whose teacher had demanded something like 500 CFA (\$0.90). He couldn't find it and was severely beaten, which pushed him to run away....

⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with social coordinator of a children's center in Dakar, Senegal, June 22, 2018.

⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with AEMO social worker, Diourbel region, Senegal, January 9, 2019.

⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with AEMO social worker, Louga region, Senegal, January 11, 2019.

⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with child protection agent, CPA Dakar, Senegal, June 27, 2018.

Another child, age 11, from Kolda region, was given to his uncle, a Quranic teacher with his *daara* in Tivaouane [Thiès region]... He was beaten with a whip. He ran away from the *daara* and came here to Dakar in mid-2017.⁹¹

During a June 2018 visit by Human Rights Watch to a *daara* in Saint-Louis with Issa Kouyaté, director of the MDLG children's center, Kouyaté said that he saw the older *talibés* holding whips. He noted that several of the younger children had previously come to his center with injuries and marks indicative of beatings.⁹²

Children Chained, Tied or Locked Up in Daaras

Human Rights Watch documented 14 cases of *talibé* children who were chained, tied or locked up in their *daaras* during 2017 or 2018. The abuse was most often meted out to punish the *talibé* for attempting to run away, and some children were locked up for weeks or even months.

Four cases were recounted by *talibés* interviewed at children's centers in Dakar and Saint-Louis; eight cases were described to Human Rights Watch by staff members of children's centers in Dakar, Saint-Louis and Diourbel; and two cases were reported by the press and confirmed by Human Rights Watch interviews with a judicial official and a social worker.

The majority (seven) of the cases reportedly took place in *daaras* in the city of Touba, Diourbel region; four others took place in Saint-Louis region, two in Louga region, and one in the city of Tambacounda. In previous reports, Human Rights Watch has documented dozens of similar cases, of which the most and worst since 2016 have occurred in Diourbel region, followed by Saint-Louis and Louga regions.⁹³

A 13-year-old runaway *talibé* interviewed in Dakar, who had spent several years at a Quranic school in Touba, described being chained up in 2017 and earlier:

⁹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with child protection agent, CPA Dakar, Senegal, June 27, 2018.

⁹² Human Rights Watch interview with Issa Kouyaté, Director of Maison de la Gare, Saint-Louis, Senegal, June 30, 2018

⁹³ Human Rights Watch, *"I Still See The Talibés Begging,"* p. 29-30; "New Steps to Protect Talibés, Street Children," Human Rights Watch news release, July 28, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/07/28/senegal-new-steps-protect-talibes-street-children>.

If we tried to run away, the *marabout* would chain us by both legs so we couldn't move. He left some *talibés* like that for months. For me it was about three weeks. I was able to get the chains off by using a metal wire to break the lock, and then I escaped and ran away... I came to Dakar, because if the *marabout* or my parents saw me in Touba, they would send me back. So it was better to come to Dakar.⁹⁴

A former *talibé* of around 15 or 16 years old, who had run away from his *daara* in Touba, described the abuse to which he and other children had been victim at the hands of the the *marabout* and older *talibés*, in the years leading up to and during 2017:

There was a room with grating [on the windows]– this was where they put us for the serious punishment. They would chain our legs, and leave us there for a week. They could leave you there until your parents came, or until you learned your lessons well enough. My feet were swollen because of these chains. If they locked you up and you didn't have a friend who could bring you food when the *marabout* wasn't there, you risked not eating.⁹⁵

A 14-year-old *talibé* who often spent his afternoons at a children's center in Saint-Louis told Human Rights Watch that his *marabout* had brought him with a group of Guinean *talibés* to Saint-Louis. The *marabout* asked the *talibés* to bring him 250 francs CFA (\$0.40) each day, the child said, and he whipped them with a wire if they failed to do so. The boy showed Human Rights Watch a scar on his neck, which he said was from one of these beatings; he said there were marks on his back which had already healed. He added, "The *marabout* also ties up our feet with rope if we don't bring the payment, if we don't want to go out begging, or if we do badly in our studies."⁹⁶

A runaway *talibé*, around 7 or 8 years old, interviewed by Human Rights Watch at another children's center in Saint-Louis, cited a begging quota of 500 francs CFA (\$0.90). Originally from Dakar, the child had been brought to a *daara* in the Dagana department of Saint-Louis

⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with 13-year-old runaway *talibé*, Dakar, Senegal, June 19, 2018.

⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with 15 or 16-year-old runaway *talibé*, Dakar, Senegal, June 26, 2018.

⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with 14-year-old *talibé*, Saint-Louis, Senegal, June 28, 2018.

region. “If I didn’t bring the money, they beat me with an electric cable. It hurt me on my arm,” he said, showing Human Rights Watch the large scar. He added that the *marabout* also tied up the children with rope, attaching both legs to a pole, if they didn’t bring the money.⁹⁷

Seven cases of *talibés* tied, chained or locked up were reported by staff of children’s centers in Dakar, Saint-Louis and Diourbel. The social coordinator of a children’s center run by an NGO in Dakar recounted three such cases. Referring to a child who had arrived at the center in 2016 and again in 2017, he explained:

There was a 15-year-old boy, now returned to his family, who had been chained in irons at his *daara* in Touba. He came here [to the center] for the first time in 2016, when he ran away from the *daara* due to abuse. ...We brought him back to his family in 2016, but... they returned him to the *same* *daara*. Since he was a frequent runaway, to prevent him doing the same thing again, they chained him. Once he was freed, he ran away again and came back to Dakar.⁹⁸

He described another similar case, involving a 13-year-old *talibé* who arrived at the center in December 2017 after fleeing his *daara* in Touba. “[The child] reportedly ran away several times, and each time his father brought him back to the *daara*,” the center’s social coordinator said. “He was abused and chained by the ankle repeatedly at this *daara*, and he was forced to beg.”⁹⁹

In the third case, the social coordinator described the story of a *talibé* child who had arrived at the center in 2017:

There was a young Gambian, 16 years old – he had been at a *daara* in Koki, in Louga [region of Senegal] since 2010. He had little contact with his family. He had run away from the *daara* because of abuse and returned to Gambia, but his father sent him back to the same *daara*. Once he had returned to

⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with 7 or 8-year old runaway *talibé*, Saint-Louis, Senegal, June 29, 2018.

⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with social coordinator of a children’s center in Dakar, Senegal, June 22, 2018.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

the *daara*, they put him in an isolation room, where he was locked up for several months. He suffered from beatings if he didn't manage to learn the Quranic verses.¹⁰⁰

In Saint-Louis, Issa Kouyaté told Human Rights Watch about a case involving a runaway *talibé* estimated to be between 9 and 11 years old. The child, found by Kouyaté in early June 2018, said he had been tied up at the *daara*. Intending to investigate, Kouyaté accompanied the child back to the *daara*, where the child's fear was evident. "When we entered the *daara*, I saw some suspicious looking guys there, watching the children... They asked me to leave the child, but the *marabout* in charge wasn't there," Kouyaté said. "The *talibé* held onto me so tightly, he was shaking so much, that I decided no, I will not leave this child here."¹⁰¹

At another Saint-Louis children's center, a staff member told Human Rights Watch that they had taken in a 17-year-old *talibé* in September 2017 after he left his *daara* in Touba, where he had been chained up for previous attempts to run away.¹⁰²

In Diourbel, a teacher at a state-run children's center said that they received three *talibés* in 2017, ages 11 to 13, who said they had run away from their *daara* in Koki, Louga region, one of whom reported having been chained up at the *daara*.¹⁰³

In Dakar, a child protection agent at the Center of First Reception (CPA) told Human Rights Watch that a *talibé*, around age 11 or 12, who ran away from his *daara* in Touba in mid-2018, had been beaten and chained up for previous attempts to run away: "He came to Pikine [in Dakar] from a *daara* in Touba, but he still had the chains on him. At the Pikine police station they actually had to cut off the chains, and that's when they called us."¹⁰⁴ She also described another similar case: a 12-year-old *talibé* who ran away from his *daara* in Touba and arrived at the center in early 2017 had "some pretty serious wounds" from beatings, and said he had been forced to beg and chained up at the *daara*.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with social coordinator of a children's center in Dakar, Senegal, June 22, 2018.

¹⁰¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Issa Kouyaté, Director, Maison de la Gare, Saint-Louis, Senegal, June 30, 2018.

¹⁰² Human Rights Watch interview with staff member at a children's center in Saint-Louis, Senegal, June 29, 2018.

¹⁰³ Human Rights Watch interview with specialized educator at a state-run children's center, Diourbel, Senegal, June 25, 2018.

¹⁰⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with child protection agent, CPA Dakar, Senegal, April 6, 2019.

¹⁰⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with child protection agent, CPA Dakar, Senegal, June 27, 2018.

One case described by a judicial official took place in August 2017 in Saint-Louis, when a *marabout* was arrested for chaining up an 8-year-old *talibé*. The police referred the case to the Saint-Louis High Court. The judicial official told Human Rights Watch: “The child had managed to run away, with the chains still attached to his feet... The Quranic teacher was prosecuted, but acquitted by the Court. They found chains in his Quranic school, but he said it was one of his assistants who did it... but I’d estimate that if the chains are there, he – as the one in charge – brought them there to chain the children.” At time of writing, the prosecutor had appealed the ruling.¹⁰⁶



This 8-year-old *talibé* child ran away from his *daara* in Saint-Louis with chains still attached to his feet in August 2017. Original photo taken August 2017. Published with permission from the High Court of Saint-Louis, Senegal.

Another case, reported in the local press and handled by an AEMO social worker, took place in June 2018 in Tambacounda, where a Quranic teacher was arrested and prosecuted for imprisoning an 11-year-old *talibé* in a room for several months. Dan Boubou Cissokho, the Tambacounda AEMO coordinator who handled the case, said:

The *talibé* kept running away, so the *marabout* locked him up for punishment. He was confined to a room for several months... I’m not sure how many months, but he spent a long time there. When I saw him the child was very, very weak. He might even have been anemic – the *marabout* had withheld his meals. [The child] also had injuries because of corporal punishment. I saw the wounds on his back myself – the child was with me

¹⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch interviews with judicial official, Saint-Louis High Court, Senegal, June 28, 2018 and June 5, 2019.

for a week. I'm not sure what the *marabout* beat him with – it could have been an electric cable.¹⁰⁷

According to a document from the prosecutor's office of the Tambacounda High Court, "the accused admitted having, in an episodic manner, subjected his *talibé* to a confinement in a compartment of his home; but he alleged an educational motive by explaining that it was to prevent the child from running away." Ultimately, the Quranic teacher was convicted of "premeditated violence and assault on a child under 15 years of age, where the author has authority over the victim," but sentenced only to two years of probation.¹⁰⁸

Despite some arrests of Quranic teachers for chaining or imprisoning *talibés* in recent years, such abusive practices persist, as the above cases demonstrate. The children's evidence also highlight the existence of extremely abusive *daaras* committing multiple serious violations – forcing *talibés* to beg, administering beatings, and tying or locking them up – in multiple regions across the country.

Rape and Sexual Abuse

Human Rights Watch documented a total of 15 cases of rape, sexual abuse, or attempted sexual abuse allegedly committed by 10 Quranic teachers or their assistants during 2017 and 2018, targeting at least 10 boys and five girls, all Quranic students. Six of the perpetrators were allegedly Quranic teachers, implicated in attacks against nine children, while four were reportedly Quranic teachers' assistants (older *talibés*), implicated in attacks against six children.

Five of these cases took place in 2018, in Thiès, Kaolack and Fatick regions; eight took place in 2017, in Saint-Louis, Dakar and Diourbel regions; and two reported in 2018 occurred at an unspecified date, in Diourbel region. Five cases – occurring in early 2017 – were previously documented in a July 2017 Human Rights Watch report.¹⁰⁹ Of the 10 other cases, two were documented in an interview with a *talibé* witness, two were reported by a

¹⁰⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Dan Boubou Cissokho, coordinator, AEMO Tambacounda, Tambacounda, Senegal, August 2, 2018.

¹⁰⁸ High Court of Tambacounda, Office of the Prosecutor, Kaolack Court of Appeals, "Informations et données statistiques sur des cas de violences ou abus ou trafic de migrants à l'égard du mineurs commis par leurs maîtres coraniques ou enseignants": 2012-2018 (document on file with Human Rights Watch).

¹⁰⁹ See: Human Rights Watch, "*I Still See The Talibés Begging*," p. 31-32.

judicial official, one was reported by the director of a children’s center, one was extracted from an official court document, and four were reported in local media and confirmed by judicial officials or government social workers.

The 15 cases documented are not an exhaustive list. Child protection workers believe other cases likely went unreported by families and victims, due to the stigma associated with sexual abuse as well as the strong societal influence wielded by religious leaders.¹¹⁰ Also, some regional courts and judicial officials did not respond to requests from Human Rights Watch or Senegal’s Human Rights Directorate for information on cases; one prosecutor mentioned dealing with several cases of sexual abuse or rape by “a person responsible for the education of the victim,” including Quranic teachers or *grands talibés*, but did not provide specific evidence or information.¹¹¹

Cases Involving Male Talibés

In June 2018, a runaway *talibé* of around 15 or 16 years old told Human Rights Watch how he had seen at least two *talibé* boys at his *daara* in Touba, Diourbel region sexually assaulted by older *talibés*. He said that this had happened more than once, but was not able to provide more details and appeared upset by the memories. “Sometimes the oldest *talibés* tried to ‘make love’ with the youngest ones,” he said. “I didn’t experience this, but there were some *talibés* who were forced to do this. If they didn’t, the older *talibés* would beat them. The victims were around 11 years old.”¹¹²

Another case of sexual abuse was reported to Human Rights Watch by the director of a children’s center in Dakar. “In May or June 2017, we received a youth around 18 years old who had been a victim of sexual abuse by an older *talibé* at his *daara* in the Fouta when he was younger, around 13 or 14 years old,” the director said. “When he arrived at our center, we had been warned that he had tried to commit these acts himself against other children, so we monitored him closely. He attempted to sexually abuse a child [around 10 or 11 years old] in the center during the morning washing hour, but thanks to the vigilance of a colleague – who followed him to the toilets and intervened – it did not happen.”¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews with social workers and child protection experts, Dakar, Diourbel and Saint-Louis regions, June 2018 to January 2019.

¹¹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with public prosecutor, Louga region, Senegal, January 11, 2019.

¹¹² Human Rights Watch interview with 15 or 16-year-old runaway *talibé*, Dakar, Senegal, June 26, 2018.

¹¹³ Human Rights Watch interviews with children’s center director in Dakar, Senegal, June 27, 2018 and April 6, 2019.

According to a judicial official in Diourbel and media reports, in December 2017, a Quranic teacher from the Médinatoul district of Diourbel was convicted and sentenced to 10 years in prison for the rape of two boys aged 15 and less than 13 years old who attended his *daara*.¹¹⁴

Cases Involving Female Talibés

In March 2018, in the town of Karang in Foundiougne department, Fatick region, a Quranic teacher was convicted and sentenced to 10 years in prison for raping one of his students, a 13-year-old girl.¹¹⁵

In another March 2018 case, in Niore department of Kaolack region, a *grand talibé* just under the age of 18 allegedly raped three girls between the ages of 7 and 12 who attended his Quranic school. The *grand talibé* was arrested and a judicial investigation opened, but a judicial official in Kaolack said that “he was granted a provisional liberty after six months of detention, as provided by the law if the investigation is not completed within this period.”¹¹⁶ At time of writing, the case had not proceeded to trial.

In November 2018, the local media reported that a *marabout* in Mbour, Thiès region, had been arrested for sexually abusing one of his *talibés*, a 7-year-old girl, in October.¹¹⁷ A government social worker in Mbour confirmed the case and reported that the *marabout* himself had confessed to the act.¹¹⁸ He was acquitted in January 2019 for “lack of evidence.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with judicial official, Diourbel High Court, Senegal, June 25, 2018, and email correspondence, June 29, 2018; see also: “Diourbel - 10 ans ferme pour le maître coranique qui violait son ‘Talibé,’” *SeneWeb*, December 28, 2017, http://www.seneweb.com/news/Justice/diourbel-10-ans-ferme-pour-le-maitre-cor_n_234536.html (accessed June 9, 2018).

¹¹⁵ High Court of Fatick, Office of the Public Prosecutor, Kaolack Court of Appeals, “Etat de poursuites concernant les maîtres coraniques pour exploitation sous forme de traite des personnes, violences de tout genre ou homicides commis sur leurs élèves appelés ‘talibés’: Courant année 2018,” (document on file with Human Rights Watch).

¹¹⁶ Human Rights Watch email correspondence with judicial official, Kaolack High Court, Senegal, January 25, 2019; interview with government social worker, Kaolack, December 17, 2018.

¹¹⁷ “Mbour : un maître coranique, accusé d’attouchement sexuel...accuse Satan,” *SeneNews*, November 24, 2018, https://www.senenews.com/actualites/mbour-un-imam-accuse-dattouchement-sexuel-invoque-satan_254106.html (accessed December 1, 2018).

¹¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with government social worker, Mbour, Senegal, December 12, 2018 and April 6, 2019.

¹¹⁹ High Court of Mbour, Thiès Court of Appeals, “Etat Des Affaires Jugées dont les Victimes sont des Talibés,” 2019 (on file with Human Rights Watch).

Sexual Attacks Against Talibés in the Street

Human Rights Watch was also informed of two incidents in which *talibés* were sexually assaulted by strangers in the street. Both children had reportedly stayed out in the streets late at night out of fear of returning to an abusive *daara*.¹²⁰

In November 2018, local press reported that a street vendor in Mbour had allegedly raped a 7-year-old *talibé* in the late hours of the night or very early morning.¹²¹ An government social worker in Mbour, who was informed of the incident shortly after it happened, said:

I don't know whether he was begging, but I heard that it was very late at night, so you have to ask what this child was doing in the streets at that hour. Either he was afraid to return to the *daara* because he didn't have the money he was asked to bring, or he was abused and had run away. ...We encounter these kinds of incidents at our structure [social services] all the time.¹²²

While the perpetrator was prosecuted, there was reportedly no formal investigation into the Quranic teacher as to why his *talibé* was out on the street so late.¹²³

On February 9, 2019 in Saint-Louis, during a night walk to search for children in the streets, a Reuters journalist and MDLG director Issa Kouyaté witnessed and intervened to stop the rape of an 8-year-old *talibé* boy in a corner of the Saint-Louis bus station.¹²⁴ Kouyaté told Human Rights Watch that the perpetrator was a teenager who worked at the station. He recounted:

¹²⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Issa Kouyaté, director, Maison de la Gare, Saint-Louis, Senegal, March 10, 2019; interview with government social worker, Mbour, Senegal, December 12, 2018.

¹²¹ "Mbour: Un marchand ambulant surpris sur un talibé de 7 ans," *Senegal7*, November 5, 2018, <http://www.senegal7.com/mbour-un-marchand-ambulant-surpris-sur-un-talibe-de-7-ans/> (accessed November 20, 2018).

¹²² Human Rights Watch interview with government social worker, Mbour, Senegal, December 12, 2018.

¹²³ Human Rights Watch interview with judicial official, High Court of Mbour, Thiès region, Senegal, April 10, 2019; interview with government social worker, Mbour, Senegal, April 6, 2019.

¹²⁴ Zohra Bensemra and Juliette Jabkhiro, "Forced to beg, Senegal's 'talibes' face exploitation and abuse," Reuters, February 23, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-senegal-election-child-beggars/forced-to-beg-senegals-talibes-face-exploitation-and-abuse-idUSKCN1QB1QA> (accessed February 23, 2019); Human Rights Watch interview with Issa Kouyaté, director, Maison de la Gare, Saint-Louis, Senegal, March 10, 2019.

We arrived just in time. The [*talibé*] child was on the ground and held down by the guy, who had removed his pants. We stopped him in the middle of the act – he hadn’t been able to penetrate the child. ...The child got up with his head covered in dirt – his pants were down, and he was in complete shock... he couldn’t speak, he was terrified.

...Later, I asked the boy about what happened. He told me he had been sleeping outside. He had run away from his *daara* [in Léona, Saint-Louis], because he hadn’t gotten enough money [from begging] for the *marabout*, and he was afraid he’d be beaten. I saw he had whip marks on his back – clearly they had already been beating him.¹²⁵

Kouyaté said he reported the incident to the police, who deferred the situation to AEMO social services. However, he said the child’s *marabout* was uncooperative and refused to provide the parents’ contact information so that the boy could be returned home, claiming it would “bring him other problems.”¹²⁶

Neglect and Endangerment

Whether due to extreme poverty or negligence, many Quranic teachers fail to fulfill their responsibilities in regards to ensuring the health and safety of the children in their care. The combination of neglect and endangerment takes various forms and, as noted above, resulted in the deaths of at least 13 *talibé* children over the past two years. From early 2018 to early 2019, during visits to four regions – Dakar, Diourbel, Louga and Saint-Louis – Human Rights Watch documented dozens of cases of neglect and endangerment of children living in traditional *daaras*.

¹²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Issa Kouyaté, director, Maison de la Gare, Saint-Louis, Senegal, March 10, 2019.

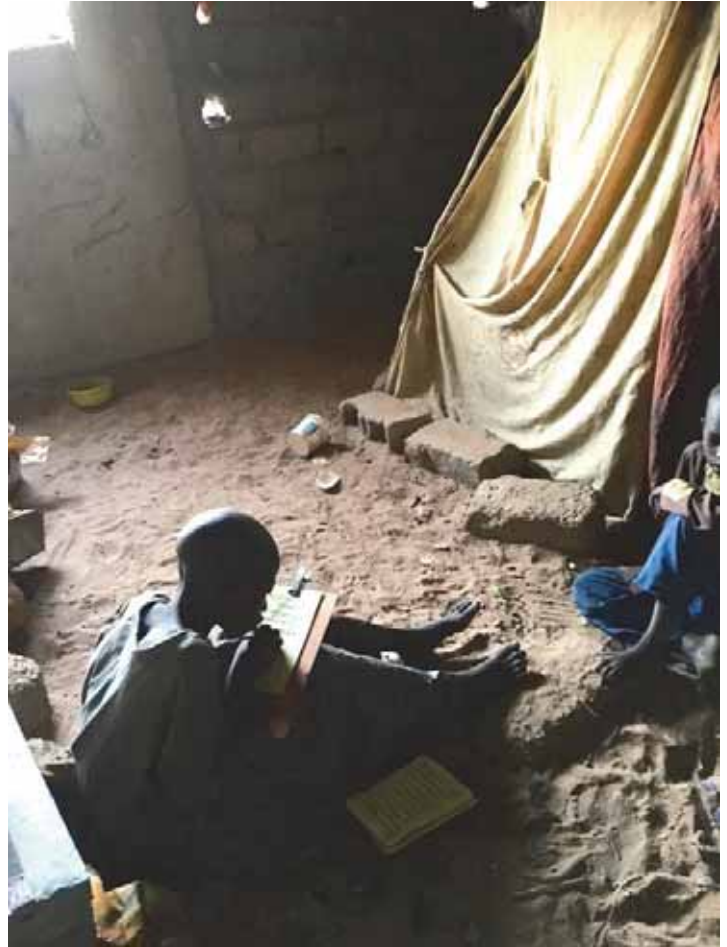
¹²⁶ Ibid.

Squalid and Unsafe Daaras

Many of the poorest traditional Quranic schools across the country continue to operate in decrepit, squalid buildings with unhygienic or unsafe conditions. In many of the worst or poorest *daaras*, multiple factors pose severe health risks to the children: lack of mosquito bed nets to protect the children from disease; lack of bathing soap, running water or working toilets; stagnant water; filthy, broken, or nonexistent latrines; trash, sewage and flies clogging the ground and air inside or outside *daara* compounds; and children crammed in overcrowded rooms at night. *Daaras* housed in crumbling or poorly built structures also posed fire and security hazards.

Between June 2018 and January 2019, Human Rights Watch visited 22 Quranic schools in the cities of Dakar, Diourbel, Saint-Louis, Touba, Louga and Koki, including 15 traditional *daaras* that

practiced begging. Several of the *daaras* visited housed from dozens to hundreds of *talibés* in conditions of extreme squalor, often in unfinished or abandoned buildings missing walls, floors or windows. At many of the *daaras*, some *talibés* regularly slept outside, exposed to the elements and to malaria-carrying mosquitos. “I couldn’t tell you how many children sleep in a room... there are so many that it’s completely full... sometimes they have to sleep outside,” said a Quranic teacher in Diourbel.¹²⁷ Most Quranic teachers interviewed noted that malaria among the children was a recurring problem,



A *talibé* child studies the Quran in a *daara* in Touba, while another child looks on. Behind them is a makeshift tent where some of the children slept on night, on the sandy ground. January 8, 2019.

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¹²⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Quranic teacher, Diourbel, Senegal, June 24, 2018.



A group of *talibé* children on the rooftop terrace of a *daara* in Touba that housed over 100 *talibés* in a large, unfinished building with no paved floors. At night, the children either slept inside on sheets on the sand, or on the terrace, exposed to malaria-carrying mosquitos. January 8, 2019.

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particularly during the rainy season but also at other times.¹²⁸

A particularly squalid *daara* visited in Touba in January 2019 housed over 100 very young *talibés*, many between the ages of five and ten, in a large, unfinished building with no floors – the children either slept on plastic or sheets directly on the sand, since there were not enough mats, or they slept on the rooftop terrace, exposed to mosquitos. Trash was strewn across the ground. The Quranic teacher, who did not know the exact number of *talibés* at his *daara*, told Human Rights Watch that most of the children were from his village in Kaolack region. He explained that after he himself had been a *talibé* in Touba, he

¹²⁸ Human Rights Watch interviews with Quranic teachers in Diourbel, Saint-Louis, Dakar, Touba and Louga, Senegal, June 2018 and December 2019.



Scores of children at this *daara* in Touba slept on sheets on the rooftop terrace each night, exposed to malaria-carrying mosquitos. January 8, 2019. © 2019 Lauren Seibert /Human Rights Watch

returned to his village to collect *talibés* to bring back to Touba. None of the children’s parents contributed to the *daara*, which supported itself entirely on child begging. These young *talibés* – barefoot and filthy, wearing torn and ragged clothes – were required to beg for three meals a day, along with money to support the “needs of the *daara*.” If they brought back uncooked rice, the teacher said he sold it. Some had gone up to three years without hearing from their parents, he said.¹²⁹

Human Rights Watch visited a *daara* in Saint-Louis in June 2018 which housed over 100 *talibés*, but the Quranic teacher was unable to provide the exact number. He said that the *talibés* begged for all their meals, as well as for money. Flies swarmed around the children as they studied on threadbare mats, which they also used to sleep on at night. “We don’t have enough mats, and there is not enough space on the mats, so some of the children

¹²⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Quranic teacher, Touba, Senegal, January 8, 2019.



Some of the children at this *daara* in Touba slept inside on sheets or plastic tarps, or directly on the sand. January 8, 2019. © 2019 Lauren Seibert /Human Rights Watch

have to sleep piled on top of each other,” he said.¹³⁰ The *daara*, lodged in a compound of old, crumbling buildings that were soon to be torn down, contained no working toilets and reportedly flooded during the rainy season. Human Rights Watch observed three sick *talibé* children resting inside the *daara*, including one with a foot infection; none had yet received medical treatment, according to the Quranic teacher.¹³¹

Another Saint-Louis *daara* housed some 50 *talibés* between the ages of 7 and 25 and was located in a swamp of filthy water, trash and sewage. “I hate this swampy area full of trash, full of disease, with our crumbling walls,” the Quranic teacher told Human Rights Watch. He reported that the children often fell sick of malaria, pneumonia or other diseases.

¹³⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Quranic teacher (a), Saint-Louis, Senegal, June 30, 2018.

¹³¹ Ibid.



The broken down latrine area of a *daara* in Dakar, June 23, 2018.

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“Sometimes they cough all night,” he said.¹³² Yet the *talibés* were not all local – some originated from Kaolack, Mbour, and Dakar regions, while some were from Gambia – suggesting that the Quranic teacher or his assistants continued to seek and enlist children to attend the *daara*, despite the deplorable conditions. The Quranic teacher said that the *talibés* begged for all three meals and they also brought money, rice, sugar back to the *daara*.¹³³

In the case of one *daara* visited in Dakar, Human Rights Watch found that the head *marabout* himself did not live at the *daara*, lodging elsewhere in Dakar with his family and leaving the care of his 55 *talibés* to a younger teacher over the age of 18.¹³⁴ The children, some as young as 5 years old, were dirty and dressed in rags, most with no shoes. Some

¹³² Human Rights Watch interview with Quranic teacher (b), Saint-Louis, Senegal, June 30, 2018.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with assistant Quranic teacher, Dakar, Senegal, June 23, 2018.

had sores on their feet. They studied each day on the sand under a makeshift pavilion with a flimsy metal roof, the ground littered with trash and the air swarming with flies. The younger Quranic teacher told Human Rights Watch that the children begged daily for all their meals, as well as for money, rice and sugar.¹³⁵

In Louga, one of the *daaras* seen by Human Rights Watch in January 2019 consisted of nothing more than a cluster of poorly constructed stick huts on the sand, with trash strewn across the ground. There was no water source, no latrine, no electricity and no mosquito nets. The 40 talibés had been brought to Louga town from villages in Louga and Thiès regions. With no support from the parents, the *marabout* said the children supported the *daara* through their begging.¹³⁶

Failure to Provide Food and Medical Treatment

Many of the *talibés* interviewed by Human Rights Watch from 2018 to early 2019, describing their experiences over the years, said they received no food at their *daara*, having to beg for all meals.¹³⁷ A 13-year-old *talibé* who had run away from his *daara* in Touba told Human Rights Watch: “We had to beg for the food, and it was the oldest who ate the food collected first. If there was anything left, we could eat. If there was nothing left, we had to beg for food again.”¹³⁸

Thirteen Quranic teachers interviewed said they were unable to provide sufficient (or any) meals to their *talibés*; in some of these cases, the children received some food from community sponsors (*ndeye daaras*), but in most cases they still had to beg.¹³⁹

Human Rights Watch also encountered numerous sick *talibés* begging in the streets of Dakar – malnourished or suffering from skin infections or other diseases – who said that either their *marabout* did not provide medication or did not ensure the children received medical treatment at health centers.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with assistant Quranic teacher, Dakar, Senegal, June 23, 2018.

¹³⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Quranic teacher, Louga, Senegal, January 12, 2019.

¹³⁷ Human Rights Watch interviews with current and former *talibé* children in Dakar and Saint-Louis, Senegal, June 2018 and January 2019.

¹³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with 13-year-old runaway *talibé*, Dakar, Senegal, June 19, 2018.

¹³⁹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Quranic teachers in Diourbel, Saint-Louis, Dakar, Touba, and Louga, Senegal, June 2018 and January 2019.

¹⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with *talibés* in the streets of Dakar, Senegal, June 2018.

In Dakar, a 10-year-old *talibé* begging in the Hann Mariste neighborhood in June 2018 appeared severely ill. Sweat dripped from his head as he spoke in a scratchy voice, asking for money, his eyes half closed. Bloody sores were visible on his body. The child told Human Rights Watch that he needed to find 600 francs CFA (\$1) each day or suffer punishment from the *marabout*. For his illness, he said that his teacher had given him some kind of medication, but had not taken him to see a doctor.¹⁴¹



A 10-year-old *talibé* begging for money in Dakar appeared severely ill, and bloody sores were visible on his arms. June 19, 2018.

© 2018 Lauren Seibert/Human Rights Watch

In Saint-Louis in June 2018, Human Rights Watch spoke with one young *talibé* who was in very bad physical condition, suffering from scabies all over his body. The child had difficulty communicating and appeared listless.¹⁴²

Some Quranic teachers told Human Rights Watch that the children received medical care.¹⁴³ One *marabout* said he created a “fund” for medical expenses from the children’s begging money.¹⁴⁴ Others acknowledged that they struggled to afford medicines or healthcare costs.¹⁴⁵

In many cases, *marabouts* are often away from the *daara*, entrusting care of the children to an older *talibé* (often between 16 and 22 years old) without the training or capacity to ensure proper medical care – as in the November 2018 case in Saint-Louis (noted earlier in this section) in which two *talibés* died of malaria after not receiving treatment in time.

¹⁴¹ Human Rights Watch interview with 10-year-old *talibé* child, Hann Mariste, Dakar, Senegal, June 19, 2018.

¹⁴² Human Rights Watch interview with Issa Kouyaté, director, Maison de la Gare, June 28, 2018.

¹⁴³ Human Rights Watch interviews with Quranic teachers in Diourbel, Saint-Louis, Dakar, Touba, and Louga, Senegal, June 2018 and January 2019.

¹⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Quranic teacher, Diourbel, Senegal, June 24, 2018.

¹⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch interviews with Quranic teachers in Diourbel, Saint-Louis, Dakar, Touba, and Louga, Senegal, June 2018 and January 2019.

Talibé Abuse Victims and Runaways in Children’s Shelters

Staff at both government-run and non-governmental children’s shelters and reception centers in multiple cities told Human Rights Watch that *talibés* formed a large percentage of the children they took in each year, including in 2017 and 2018. Such centers generally assist children that are separated, at risk, victims of abuse, or in conflict with the law. Most of the *talibés* they assisted were runaways who they said had fled situations of forced begging, abuse, or difficult living conditions.¹⁴⁶

From June 2018 to January 2019, Human Rights Watch visited 13 children’s centers – seven in Dakar, four in Saint-Louis, one in Diourbel, and one in Louga. Two were day centers and 11 were short- or long-term shelters providing accommodation. All but one of the shelters hosted *talibé* children at the time of visit.

In Dakar, Empire des Enfants center took in 254 children in 2017, including 174 *talibés*; in 2018, they assisted 139 children, including 84 *talibés* who were “victims of exploitation by forced begging.”¹⁴⁷ In 2018, Yakaaru Guneyi center took in 338 children, including 162 *talibés*, of which 139 had reportedly “run away from violence in daaras.”¹⁴⁸ Samu Social, a humanitarian organization that provides shelter and medical, social and psychological assistance to children in danger – including street children – reported that more than half (423 out of 811) of the children assisted in 2017 were current or former *talibés*, with similar figures in 2018 (832 children assisted, including 417 current or former *talibés*).¹⁴⁹ Ginddi Center hosted 35 children, including 21 *talibés*, at the time of visit in January 2019.¹⁵⁰

In Diourbel, a teacher at a government-run children’s center explained why *talibés* end up at the center:

What we find is that it’s the living conditions that the *talibé* children can’t handle, as well as the total rupture with their family. ...Most times they [the

¹⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch interviews with social workers and staff members, children’s shelters in Dakar, Diourbel and Saint-Louis, June 2018 and January 2019.

¹⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch interview and email correspondence with Alassane Diagne, Coordinator, Empire des Enfants, Dakar, Senegal, June 18, 2018 and May 30, 2019.

¹⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with staff member, Yakaaru Guneyi, Dakar, Senegal, June 21, 2018; email correspondence with Danielle Huèges, executive director, Unies Vers’elle Sénégal, Dakar, Senegal, June 6, 2019.

¹⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch email correspondence with Samu Social Senegal, June 26, 2018 and April 17, 2019.

¹⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with social worker Ginddi Center, Dakar, Senegal, January 4, 2019.

talibés] are traumatized, not only by the *marabout*, but by the younger teachers – they suffer many abuses. ...Sometimes former *talibés* get caught up in petty crime to avoid returning to the *daaras*.¹⁵¹

The Center of First Reception (CPA) in Saint-Louis had the largest percentage of *talibés*, who accounted for 13 of the 15 boys in the center at the time of visit in June 2018. A child protection agent at the center said that many had experienced abuse or forced begging. He explained:

Around 90 percent of the children we receive here in this center are *talibés* who ran away from their *daara*. It's a particularity of Saint-Louis – we have so many *daaras*. ...Many children we've interviewed mention a daily begging quota of 150 CFA (\$0.30), for the younger children, and 300 CFA (\$0.50) for older children... This situation pushes some *talibé* children to pursue other activities to get the amount requested by the Quranic teacher – fishing, working in the market, in houses to do small jobs... Some *talibés* go as far as committing minor crimes [e.g. theft] that lead them to the police or gendarmerie, before they're referred to the CPA. Forced begging is a danger for *talibé* children – instead of receiving a good Quranic education, they risk becoming delinquents...There are some *daaras* where the children don't even learn the Quran – they are 24 hours in the street.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interview with teacher at a government-run children's center, Diourbel, Senegal, June 25, 2018.

¹⁵² Human Rights Watch interview with child protection agent, CPA Saint-Louis, Senegal, June 29, 2018.

IV. Human Trafficking and Dangers Linked to Talibé Migration

Human Rights Watch research suggests that hundreds of *talibé* children in 2017 and 2018 were victims of human trafficking, which under Senegalese law includes the act of harboring of children in a *daara* and exploiting them for money through forced begging, as well as the recruitment or transport of children for this purpose.¹⁵³

“Often, Quranic studies are just a cover – a lot of *talibé* children are trafficking victims,” said Modou Diop, manager of the Enda Jeunesse Action children’s day center in Dakar. “The parents entrust their child to a *marabout*, who brings the children to another country, installs them in a building, and sends them out begging. Sometimes years go by, and the children never hear from their parents.”¹⁵⁴

Since 2010, Human Rights Watch has documented how dozens of Quranic teachers and hundreds of *talibé* children migrate to Senegal’s major cities each year from other villages and regions, as well as across country borders – most commonly from Guinea Bissau, Guinea, or Gambia, and sometimes from Mali.¹⁵⁵ Children often travel across long distances to attend these urban *daaras* and are either brought by a family member, sent on their own, or brought in a group of children by Quranic teachers or their assistants, many of whom regularly travel to villages and rural areas to recruit *talibés*.¹⁵⁶

Such “recruitment” takes the form of Quranic teachers or their assistants approaching parents and families, often in rural areas, to propose or request that they entrust the *marabout* with one or more of their children in order to teach them the Quran.¹⁵⁷ Some of the *marabouts* interviewed by Human Rights Watch cited several reasons for transporting

¹⁵³ République du Sénégal, Loi n° 2005-06 du 10 Mai 2005 relative à la lutte contre la traite des personnes, art. 1 and 3 (unofficial translation by Human Rights Watch).

¹⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Modou Diop, manager of Enda Jeunesse Action Centre de Jour, Pikine, Dakar, June 21, 2018.

¹⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch, “I See The Talibés Begging” (2017); “Off the Backs of the Children” (2010); interviews with Quranic teachers, *talibé* children, social workers and child protection experts, 2016-2019.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interviews with Quranic teachers, Dakar, Diourbel, Touba, Louga and Saint-Louis, Senegal, June 2018 and January 2019.



A *talibé* child in Diourbel, June 24, 2018. © 2018 Lauren Seibert/Human Rights Watch

talibé children from rural areas to the city: because they themselves were brought from the village to the city as young children to become *talibés*; because they saw the city as a center of religious learning and scholarship; and for economic reasons.¹⁵⁸ Recruiting *talibé* children to attend a *daara* for religious education is not a crime – but it becomes a crime punishable under Senegalese law when children are recruited to *daaras* for the “exploitation of begging.”¹⁵⁹

The NGO Enda Jeunesse Action is authorized by the Senegalese government to coordinate return, reunification and reintegration of separated children with their families in other countries through the West Africa Network for the Protection of Children (WAN) – a transnational network of governments and civil society organizations focused on child

¹⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch interviews with Quranic teachers, Dakar, Diourbel, Touba, Louga and Saint-Louis, Senegal, June 2018 and January 2019.

¹⁵⁹ République du Sénégal, Loi n° 2005-06 du 10 Mai 2005 relative à la lutte contre la traite des personnes, art. 1 and 3 (unofficial translation by Human Rights Watch).

protection, recognized as “the referral mechanism for the protection of Children on the Move in West Africa” by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).¹⁶⁰ Enda Jeunesse Action’s Senegal office reported to Human Rights Watch that *talibés* form a strikingly high percentage of the children they return each year. In 2017, Enda returned 124 separated children found in various regions of Senegal to their countries of origin, including Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Gambia, Mauritania, Mali and Nigeria. Of these, 118 were *talibés*.¹⁶¹ In 2018, 110 of the 128 children Enda returned were *talibés*, including 83 returned to Guinea Bissau, 17 to Gambia, six to Mali, three to Liberia, and one to Niger.¹⁶²

Senegal and other ECOWAS countries have taken steps in recent years to address issues related to the vulnerability of children on the move in the West Africa region, including by establishing the WAN to coordinate returns of separated children, as well as adopting standards on the protection of children on the move (2016), a strategic framework on child protection (2017), and the “ECOWAS Child Policy and its Strategic Action Plan (2019-2023).”¹⁶³ Senegal has also committed to funding a 2018-2020 national anti-trafficking action plan and has increased funding to the National Anti-Trafficking Unit in recent years.¹⁶⁴ These are all important steps. However, as Human Rights Watch and PPDH’s findings illustrate, the many complex and overlapping problems associated with the movement of *talibé* children – human trafficking within Senegal and across borders, abandonment by parents or *marabouts*, runaways that end up living on the streets, and even risk of recruitment by Islamist armed groups operating in the region – remain ongoing.

¹⁶⁰ ECOWAS, *Support Procedures and Standards for the Protection and Reintegration of Vulnerable Children on the Move and Young Migrants*, 2016, p. 3.

¹⁶¹ Human Rights Watch email correspondence with Mbagnick Birame Ndiaye, Deputy Coordinator (*Coordinateur adjoint*) of Enda Jeunesse Action - Dakar, Senegal, July 13, 2018.

¹⁶² Enda Jeunesse Action, “Coordination nationale du RAO Sénégal: du 1 Janvier au 31 décembre 2018” (document on file with Human Rights Watch).

¹⁶³ ECOWAS, “Launch of the Project to Support Member States in the Eradication of the ‘Children in the Street’ Phenomenon,” 2015 (document on file with Human Rights Watch); ECOWAS, *Support Procedures and Standards for the Protection and Reintegration of Vulnerable Children on the Move and Young Migrants*, 2016; ECOWAS, *Strategic Framework for Strengthening National Child Protection Systems to prevent and respond to Violence, Abuse and Exploitation against Children in West Africa*, 2017; ECOWAS, “ECOWAS moves to protect Child rights and prevent Child marriage in the region,” January 28, 2019, <https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-moves-to-protect-child-rights-and-prevent-child-marriage-in-the-region/> (accessed May 2, 2019).

¹⁶⁴ Samba Niébé Ba, “Sénégal: Lutte contre la traite des personnes - Un nouveau plan triennal en gestation,” All Africa, December 7, 2017, <https://fr.allafrica.com/stories/201712070726.html> (accessed May 2, 2019); U.S. Department of State, “Senegal: Tier 2 Watch List,” *2018 Trafficking in Persons Report*, June 28, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-trafficking-in-persons-report/senegal/> (accessed May 28, 2019).

Risks and Dangers to Migrating Talibé Children

At least 18 of the Quranic schools visited by Human Rights Watch in 2018 and 2019 (in the cities of Dakar, Diourbel, Touba, Louga, and Saint-Louis) had children originating from more than one region in Senegal at the time of visit. In total, children at these schools came from at least nine regions (Dakar, Diourbel, Saint-Louis, Thiès, Kaffrine, Kaolack, Kolda, Fatick, Tambacounda) and at least four other countries (Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali). At least four Quranic teachers interviewed at these *daaras* could not give an accurate count of how many *talibés* they had, including those from outside Senegal. In Saint-Louis, one teacher said, “It’s a bit difficult to give a number,”¹⁶⁵ while another said, “The number changes constantly as they come and go.”¹⁶⁶

In Diourbel, the circumstances are similar. “There are more and more *daaras* being installed here, with many *talibés* coming from outside Diourbel,” said Oumar Sy, coordinator of the local NGO Ndeyi-Jirim. He added that while sensitization led by NGOs had helped decrease some “bad practices” of forced begging or corporal punishment among the “local *daaras*,” he felt such practices had not reduced among the newly established *daaras*.¹⁶⁷

In the northern town of Kébémér, Louga region, in November 2017, a group of five adults – including one Senegalese Quranic teacher, three young Guinean men, and the wife of one of the men – were stopped by the police on suspicion of human trafficking and child smuggling while transporting a group of nine boys northwards, allegedly for Quranic studies. The boys were between the ages of 6 and 17 and included seven Guineans, one Senegalese, and one Liberian.¹⁶⁸ Local media reported that the adults “were not able to provide clear and precise answers to certain questions” posed by the police: they reportedly “knew very little about the identities of the children,” had insufficient money to pay for lodging, and gave inconsistent answers regarding their destination – “some said they were going to Mauritania and others said they were headed towards the Fouta [an area in northern Senegal].”¹⁶⁹ As a result, the adults were arrested and the case referred to

¹⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Quranic teacher in Saint-Louis (Médina Cours district), Senegal, June 30, 2018.

¹⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Quranic teacher in Saint-Louis (Pikine district), Senegal, June 30, 2018.

¹⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Oumar Sy, coordinator, Ndeyi-Jirim, Diourbel, Senegal, June 24, 2018.

¹⁶⁸ AEMO Louga regional office, “Rapport d’activités de l’affaire de dix (10) mineurs ressortissants de la Guinée Conakry,” December 4, 2017 (document on file with Human Rights Watch).

¹⁶⁹ “Kébémér [Louga region]: Démantèlement d’un réseau de trafic d’enfants,” *SenMedia*, December 4, 2017, <http://www.senemedia.com/article-9508-kbmer-dmantlement-dun-reseau-de-traffic-denfants.html> (accessed December 15,

the Louga public prosecutor's office, while Louga's AEMO social services office took charge of the children.¹⁷⁰

A document from the Kébémér police, seen by Human Rights Watch, included a transcript of an interview with the boy from Liberia. The boy, age 16, said that he was sent from Liberia in 2016 to study the Quran with his uncle in Guinea, who then asked permission from his father to send him to study with a Quranic teacher in Senegal. The boy recounted:

We boarded a vehicle from Labé [Guinea] to go to Senegal. After arriving in Sambaydo [Guinea], we were stopped by [border] control... three other boys and I were transferred by police to the Coundara [Guinea] Police, because we didn't have any identification papers. We arrived at the Coundara Police Service in the vehicle with the [Quranic teacher], who negotiated with the police to let us pass. After the negotiations, the police allowed us to return to Samboydo to join the others who were waiting for us there. We set off once again for Senegal. We crossed the borders without difficulty.¹⁷¹

This ability of Quranic teachers, or those claiming to be Quranic teachers, to cross into Senegal with a group of children lacking official identification or parental authorization – which could effectively constitute an act of trafficking, when the purpose is to install a *daara* practicing exploitation of begging – has remained a problem over the years, contributing to hundreds of *talibé* children regularly migrating across Senegal's borders. In this case, it is also highly problematic that “negotiations” with Guinean border police had allowed the group to depart together, even though some of the children did not have identification.

That the group in this case was stopped by police in Kébémér and held for a week-long investigation is an encouraging sign of increased vigilance regarding child trafficking in

2017); “Trafic d'enfants: une bande de ressortissants guinéens démantelée à Kébémér avec 8 mineurs,” *SeneNews*, December 4, 2017, https://www.senenews.com/actualites/trafic-denfants-une-bande-de-ressortissants-guineens-demantelee-a-kebemer-avec-8-mineurs_212136.html (accessed December 15, 2017).

¹⁷⁰ AEMO Louga regional office, “Rapport d'activités de l'affaire de dix (10) mineurs ressortissants de la Guinée Conakry,” December 4, 2017 (document on file with Human Rights Watch).

¹⁷¹ Kébémér City Police Station, General Directorate of the National Police [Commissariat Urbain de Kébémér, Direction Generale de la Police Nationale], “Proces-Verbal,” November 29, 2017 (document on file with Human Rights Watch).

Senegal. The children were not returned to the suspected traffickers, but were placed in shelters or other facilities pending return to their families.

However, the adults were ultimately released without charge, making it possible that the alleged Quranic teacher may attempt the same journey again with other children.¹⁷² “They said the objective was to establish a *daara* in the north... but from our perspective, it was not normal to bring these *talibés* from one place to another,” said an AEMO social worker in Louga who was involved in the case. “In any case, the *daara* would probably not be in good conditions.” Asked how often the Louga AEMO office dealt with cases of trafficking and exploitation of *talibé* children, he replied, “From morning to evening, we are fighting against this practice.”¹⁷³

Not only do some so-called Quranic teachers mistreat and exploit their charges for money, but occasionally children are transported from one city to another without the parents’ knowledge, as demonstrated by the statements of some parents whose children were picked up during the second phase of the government’s program to “remove children from the streets” in Dakar.¹⁷⁴ An official in the former Ministry of Good Governance and Child Protection – involved in the program in 2018 – told Human Rights Watch:

...we found that... some parents, when you’d ask them ‘where is your child?’, they’d say, ‘He’s in Touba, I gave him to a *marabout* in Kaolack, in Diourbel’ – they didn’t even know that their child was in Dakar. And that proves that human trafficking is going on.¹⁷⁵

Some *talibé* children have been effectively abandoned by Quranic teachers who do not provide for their transportation. In late 2017, for example, a Quranic teacher left some 17 *talibé* children between the ages of 12 and 15 stranded in Saint-Louis when he decided to move his *daara* to another town. Issa Kouyaté, who received the children at the Maison de la Gare center, described what happened:

¹⁷² Human Rights Watch interview with AEMO social worker, Louga region, Senegal, July 17, 2018; Human Rights Watch interview with judicial official, High Court of Louga, Louga, Senegal, January 11, 2019.

¹⁷³ Human Rights Watch interview with AEMO social worker, Louga region, Senegal, July 17, 2018.

¹⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with government official, former Ministry of Good Governance and Child Protection, June 21, 2018.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

The *marabout* left for Mbour to set himself up there, because the owner of the house where he had been living [in Saint-Louis] said “I want my house back and you have to go”... So the *marabout* took his family and the youngest *talibés* of the *daara*, and he left all the rest of the *talibés* here alone, telling them they had to find their own money to go to Mbour! They all came here one day, to Maison de la Gare, together in a group of 17 or 18 youth, because they needed money to go to Mbour. They didn’t know where to go, and they no longer had anywhere to sleep. This *marabout* – every time he used to have a problem, he’d call me, but now when I called him, he didn’t even answer his phone.¹⁷⁶

Additionally, hundreds of *talibé* children who run away from their *daaras* in Senegal each year end up living in the streets or migrating to other cities or regions, which contributes to the persistent flow of unaccompanied children across Senegal.¹⁷⁷

Due to the potential combination of factors – separation from family, limited exposure to any education beyond Quranic studies, and a migratory lifestyle – many *talibé* children are also at high risk for recruitment or use by Islamist armed groups operating in the West Africa region and the Sahel, particularly in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Cases of *talibés* forcibly recruited by armed groups in neighboring Mali have been documented by the UN and cited by other child protection experts in central Mali.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Issa Kouyaté, director, Maison de la Gare, Saint-Louis, Senegal, June 30, 2018.

¹⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch, “*I See The Talibés Begging*” (2017); “*Off the Backs of the Children*” (2010); interviews with Quranic teachers, *talibé* children, social workers and child protection experts, 2016–2019.

¹⁷⁸ UN Office on Drugs and Crime, “UNODC builds the capacities of municipal actors in the Dakar region on forced child begging,” May 24, 2018, <https://www.unodc.org/westandcentralafrica/en/2018-05-24---unodc-builds-the-capacities-of-municipal-actors-in-the-dakar-region-on-forced-child-begging.html> (accessed December 30, 2018); Human Rights Watch interview with Moussa Sylla, Chargé d’éducation, protection et formation professionnelle, Enda- Mopti, Sevaré, Mali, August 18, 2016; interview with officials from the Ministry of Family, Women and Children, Bamako, Mali, March 25, 2016.

The Role of Parents and Family

Many parents – particularly those from remote, rural areas and villages – are unaware of the forced begging, abuse, or horrific living conditions suffered by the child they entrusted to a Quranic teacher, and some are also unaware of their child’s location when certain Quranic teachers move their *daara* to a new neighborhood or city.

However, parents also play a role in perpetuating these practices. Whether due to poverty or other reasons, many parents send their children to *daaras* without providing any support for the children’s living expenses, and without verifying that children are treated well. In many cases, *talibés* lose contact with their parents for years; some are effectively abandoned. While some *marabouts* keep the contact information of the children’s parents and facilitate communication between them, others make no effort to do so.¹⁷⁹

At a state-run children’s center in Diourbel that occasionally takes in runaway *talibés*, a teacher told Human Rights Watch: “Some families send *talibés* to *daaras* to get rid of them... after sending them to *daaras*, they no longer call.”¹⁸⁰

Samba Diouf, a Quranic teacher from Diourbel, said: “Some children stay up to the point of memorizing the Quran, and they never hear from their parents, for maybe five to seven years... often the ones from the Fouta [in northern Senegal].”¹⁸¹



A *talibé* child looks at the tablets where the boys practice writing Quranic verses at a *daara* in Dakar, June 23, 2018. The children begged daily for money and all their meals.

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¹⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Quranic teachers, *talibé* children, social workers, child protection experts and government officials, June 2018 – January 2019.

¹⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with specialized educator at a state-run children’s center in Diourbel, Senegal, June 25, 2018.

In Dakar, three *talibé* children from Guinea-Bissau picked up from the streets during a November 2017 anti-trafficking operation by Senegalese police and Interpol, subsequently placed in Yakaaru Guneyi Center, told social workers they had not heard from their parents in years. According to transcripts of the child interviews, one *talibé*, age 12, said he had not heard from his parents since 2014. Another, also age 12, reportedly said he had left Guinea Bissau around two years prior: "I have not heard from my parents for a very long time. They do not call me and they do not come to visit me." The third, 13 years old, said: "I've been in the *daara* since 2016. My parents died – it's my uncle who sent me to the *daara*, and I have not heard from him since I've been in Senegal."¹⁸²

Several current or former *talibés* interviewed by Human Rights Watch in 2018 and 2019 said that they were in touch with their parents, that they had complained to them about the forced begging and wanted to go home, but that their parents did nothing.¹⁸³

Several child protection and human trafficking experts in Senegal told Human Rights Watch they were aware of some cases of parents allegedly receiving money from the Quranic teacher for entrusting him with a child.¹⁸⁴ "With some Quranic teachers, there is a certain complicity of the parents," said Souleymane Diagne, assistant for the anti-begging project in Médina, Dakar.¹⁸⁵

In other cases, when *talibés* who were forced to beg or physically abused were returned to their parents by social workers – either after running away, or after being removed from the streets (such as during the government's program to "remove children from the streets" in Dakar) or from a *daara* following an incident of abuse – the parents have later returned the child to the same *daara*, starting the cycle over again. Several *talibés* interviewed by Human Rights Watch in children's centers reported having run away from *daaras* more than once after being returned by their families.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Quranic teacher in Diourbel, Senegal, June 24, 2018.

¹⁸² Yakaaru Guneyi Center, "Opération Visant à Lutter Contre la Traite des Etres Humains au Sahel, Confiage Dic du 7 Novembre 2017, Rapports Circonstanciés Enfants," May 9, 2017 (documents on file with Human Rights Watch).

¹⁸³ Human Rights Watch interviews with current and former *talibé* children, Dakar, Senegal, June 2018 and January 2019.

¹⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with UN human trafficking expert, Dakar, Senegal, December 30, 2018; Human Rights Watch interview with Modou Diop, manager of Enda Jeunesse Action Centre de Jour in Pikine, Dakar, Senegal, June 21, 2018.

¹⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Souleymane Diagne, assistant to the monitoring and evaluation coordinator of the Project against the Exploitation and Forced Begging of Talibé Children in Médina, Dakar, Senegal, December 28, 2018.

¹⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interviews with runaway *talibé* children in Dakar and Saint-Louis, June 2018.

In Saint-Louis, a Juvenile Court official told Human Rights Watch that she had ordered the return of numerous *talibé* children who had run away from their *daaras* to their parents in 2018. “I do my best not to return children to *daaras* – the problem is the parents sending them back,” she said. She noted that those returned to their families in Guinea and Guinea-Bissau “often return here [to Saint-Louis] later.”¹⁸⁷

In 2018 and 2019, several AEMO social workers and staff members at children’s centers – including Ginddi and Empire des Enfants – described how some *talibés* they had previously assisted and returned to their parents had later ended up back in the streets, and in some cases were brought back to the same children’s center a second time.¹⁸⁸ According to Alassane Diagne, coordinator of Empire des Enfants children’s center, this is exacerbated by “the influence the *marabouts* can have on the parents,” with Quranic teachers successfully convincing some parents to give them back the child. “We have encountered this in certain families, where the *marabouts* have more authority over the children than the parents,” Diagne said.¹⁸⁹

In one case that occurred in January 2017 in Mbacke, as reported to Human Rights Watch by an AEMO social worker in Diourbel region, a 10-year-old child who was a victim of “violent punishment by the *marabout*” ran away and was assisted by AEMO. “In front of the prosecutor, the father said, ‘Even if you give me back my child, I will send him back to the *marabout*, whether or not he beats him,’” the social worker explained. In this case, according to AEMO, both the father and the Quranic teacher spent five days in prison.¹⁹⁰

A child protection agent in the Dakar Center of First Reception (CPA) reported that after a *talibé* the center had assisted was returned to his family in late 2017, even though he said he was forced to beg for a quota of 500 francs CFA (US\$0.90) and severely beaten, “his parents didn’t respect their word, [and] they placed him back in the *daara* [in Dakar].” As for another runaway *talibé* in mid-2017, who also said he had been beaten at the *daara*:

¹⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with judicial official, Saint-Louis Juvenile Court, Saint-Louis, Senegal, January 14, 2019.

¹⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch interviews with Etienne Dieng, Ginddi Center manager, Dakar, Senegal, June 26, 2018 and January 3, 2019.

¹⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Alassane Diagne, coordinator, Empire des Enfants Center, Dakar, Senegal, June 18, 2018.

¹⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with AEMO social worker, Diourbel region, Senegal, January 9, 2019.

“He gave us a false name because he didn’t want his parents to find him and return him,” the agent said.¹⁹¹

The state should put the best interest of the child at the heart of all action to protect the children. This should include investigating and prosecuting parents and others for child neglect or endangerment, or for complicity in exploitation under the 2005 anti-trafficking law, when it is in the best interests of the child to do so, including when parents intentionally sent or returned their child to an abusive or exploitative *daara* or received money for entrusting their child to a *daara* practicing child begging, where the parent has knowledge of the begging.

When returning a *talibé* child to his family is not in his best interests, such as in cases where parents repeatedly sent the child back to one or more abusive or exploitative *daaras*, child protection services should ensure the child is placed under the care of relatives or an alternative appointed guardian, in accordance with the 2017 ECOWAS Child Protection Framework.¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with child protection agent, CPA Dakar, Senegal, June 27, 2018.

¹⁹² See: Strategy 5, Section 3.5.4 on “Strategies to promote protection and reintegration of children on the move in ECOWAS region,” in ECOWAS, *Strategic Framework for Strengthening National Child Protection Systems to prevent and respond to Violence, Abuse and Exploitation against Children in West Africa*, 2017, p. 29-30 (document on file with Human Rights Watch).

Recommendations

Human Rights Watch and PPDH propose the following recommendations to ensure that *talibé* children are protected from abuse, exploitation and neglect, that their rights are fully respected, and that perpetrators of human rights violations against *talibé* children are held accountable.

To the Senegalese Government

- Enforce anti-trafficking provisions under Law No. 2005-06 – which criminalizes the recruitment, harboring, transport or transfer of persons for purposes of exploitation – including by investigating and holding accountable, in accordance with international fair trial standards, Quranic teachers and others who force children to beg or transport them from one location to another without legitimate parental authorization.
- Enforce relevant provisions of the penal code in all cases involving *talibé* children, including:
 - Articles 298-299, which criminalize the physical abuse or willful neglect of children;
 - Articles 319, 319(bis) and 320(bis), which criminalize acts of molestation, pedophilia, and sexual harassment against children;
 - Article 334, which bans unlawful imprisonment or sequestration; and
 - Article 307(bis), which criminalizes the endangerment of others through exposure to risk of death or injury.
 - This should include investigating and holding accountable in accordance with international fair trial standards any Quranic teachers or others who physically or sexually abuse *talibé* children, deprive them of food, fail to ensure medical treatment, or knowingly expose them to health or safety risks at the *daara*, in the streets or in any other location.
- Ensure that any parents that intentionally send or return children to abusive or exploitative *daaras* face legal penalties when this is in the best interests of the child, and that children are not forcibly returned to their families if this is against

their best interests; in such cases, children should be placed under the care of relatives or an appointed guardian.

- Expand child protection services in regions across Senegal and increase funding, resources and staff allocated to children’s shelters and reception centers, AEMO social services, and Departmental Child Protection Committees.
- Ensure that legal aid is available to all separated children such as *talibés* who are victims of abuse or exploitation, whether by increasing the funding and staff of AEMO services or other government agencies for this purpose, or by installing legal aid clinics in each administrative region.
- Implement the 2018-2020 national anti-trafficking action plan, including by allocating sufficient funding to the National Anti-Trafficking Unit.
- Establish a legal framework to regulate *daaras* according to health, safety and child protection standards and allocate inspectors to enforce implementation.

To the National Assembly

- Urgently vote to pass the draft law on the status of *daaras*, in order to establish a structural and institutional framework for *daaras*.
- Promptly table and adopt the draft Children’s Code.

To the Ministry of Justice

- Instruct all judges and public prosecutors to ensure full enforcement of existing laws, without arbitrary reduction of penalties, against any Quranic teachers accused of exploitation, abuse, neglect or endangerment of a *talibé* child, as well as against any parents that knowingly or intentionally return *talibé* children to abusive, exploitative or unsafe *daaras*.
- In cases where a Quranic teacher is convicted for any of the aforementioned abuses, instruct judges to include in the ruling an order for the removal of all *talibé* children from the implicated *daara*, ensuring that a plan is in place with child protection services to guarantee the safe return of the children to their parents.
- Instruct public prosecutors to take steps to investigate cases of *talibé* children killed in traffic accidents to determine whether the victim was in the streets as a result of forced begging or due to fear of returning to an abusive *daara*, with a view to prosecuting the responsible Quranic teachers, rather than focusing only on the driver of the vehicle involved.

- Instruct public prosecutors to investigate and prosecute any Quranic teacher in charge of a *daara* where one or more *talibé* children were killed or injured in a fire due to being trapped in the *daara* in the Quranic teacher's absence.
- Consider providing increased resources to regional AEMO offices, children's shelters and reception centers, and the National Anti-Trafficking Unit.

To the Ministry of the Interior

- Explicitly instruct all police officers to proceed with investigations of any suspected cases of the “exploitation of begging” (as prohibited under the 2005 anti-trafficking law) of *talibé* children by Quranic teachers, with a view to referring such cases to the prosecutor. Such investigations should include mandatory visits to the Quranic schools in question.
- Implement a strict no-warning, no-negotiation policy for any Quranic teachers found to have forced *talibés* to beg for quotas of money or committed other abuses; ensure that all police personnel are aware of this policy and enforce it without exceptions, and that all such cases are referred to the public prosecutor.
- Issue instructions to police officers in all regions who are involved in child protection cases, where a child is referred to AEMO social services or placed in a shelter or reception center, to proactively follow up with social workers and investigate any suspected cases of forced begging or abuse, including cases involving Quranic teachers.
- Issue instructions to local administrative officials, such as prefects and mayors, to organize inspections of existing *daaras* in their administrative area, with a view to ensuring that any *daaras* failing to meet appropriate health and safety standards or exploiting children through forced begging are shut down.
- Instruct border control officers to ensure that every individual, including Quranic teachers, attempting to cross the Senegalese border with a child or a group of children provides legitimate parental authorization and identification for each child; and ensure all border officials are trained to enforce the 2005 anti-trafficking law.
- Consider providing increased resources to the Juvenile Justice Unit of the National Police in Dakar, as well as toward the training and installation of police officers specializing in child protection in all regional police stations.

To the Ministry of Health and Social Action

- Issue instructions to regional and local Hygiene Services to conduct regular inspections of *daaras* within their administrative areas, with a view to reporting any *daaras* that do not meet adequate standards of safety and security to the local authorities and issuing injunctions for closure where necessary.

To All Public and Private Children’s Shelters and Reception Centers

- Ensure that all cases of physical abuse or forced begging reported by *talibé* children to social workers are documented and reported either to the police or the office of the public prosecutor, and/or to the AEMO services of the locality in Senegal where the reported abuse or exploitation took place.

To International Partners

- Increase funding and support to organizations with the capacity to provide legal aid to separated and vulnerable children such as *talibés* who are victims of abuse or exploitation.
- Increase funding and support to existing children’s centers that provide emergency shelter and services to children who are runaways or victims of abuse; consider developing or supporting projects to construct and fund urgently needed children’s emergency shelters in regions where such services are lacking, such as Diourbel and Louga.
- Consider inserting clauses and requirements on child protection into cooperation agreements with the Senegalese government, particularly clauses related to combatting forced begging, exploitation, human trafficking, or other abuses against children by those charged with their education, including public school and Quranic teachers.

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“There Is Enormous Suffering”

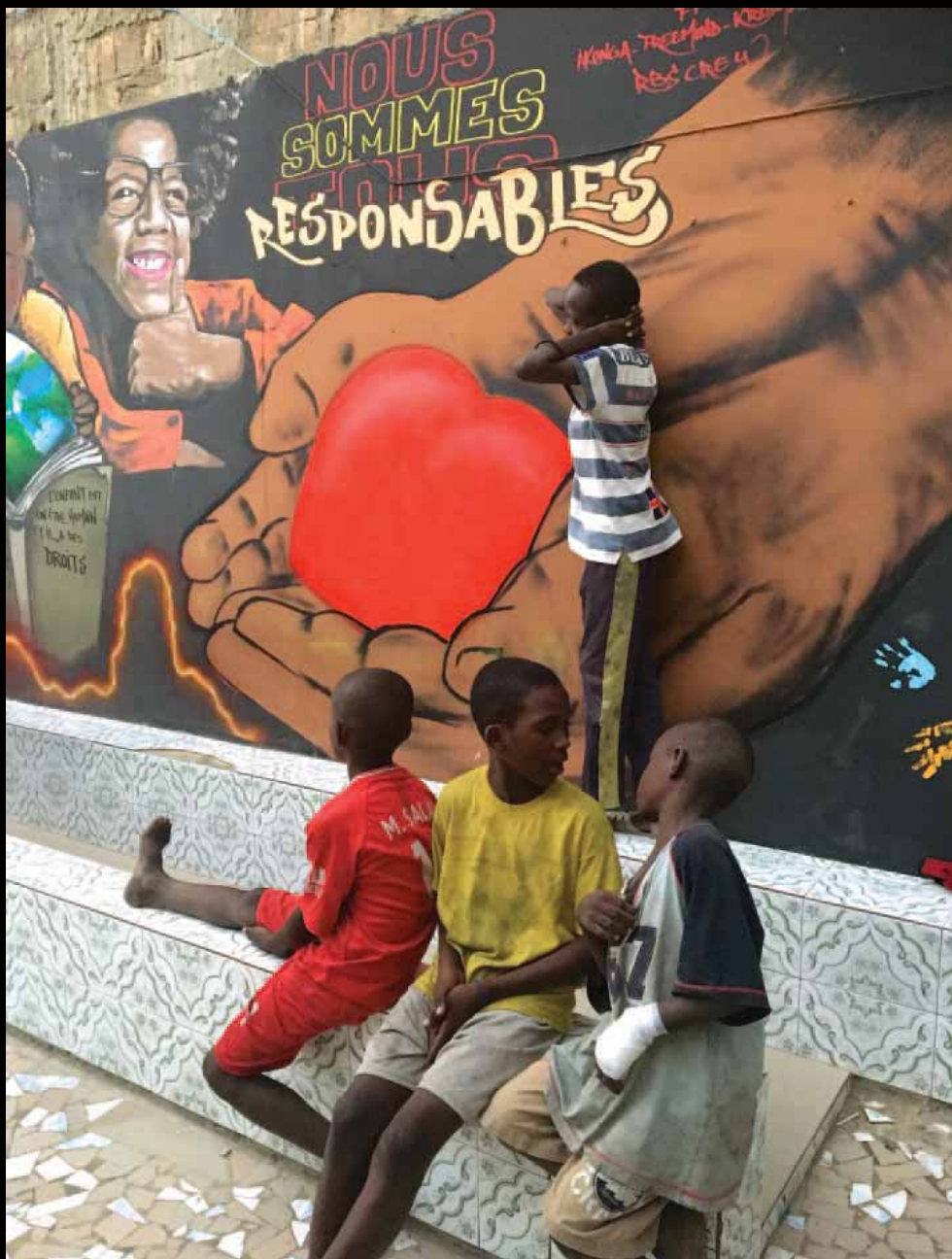
Serious Abuses Against Talibé Children in Senegal, 2017-2018

Nearly 10 years after Human Rights Watch’s first report documenting abuses against *talibé* children in Senegal, the scale of ongoing abuse remains staggering. Over 100,000 *talibé* children living in unregulated, traditional Quranic boarding schools, known as *daaras*, are forced to beg daily by their Quranic teachers. Thousands live in squalor, subject to various forms of neglect or abuse.

“*There Is Enormous Suffering*” documents scores of serious abuses committed against *talibé* children in 2017 and 2018 by Quranic teachers or their assistants. The abuses took place in eight of Senegal’s 14 regions, and include forced begging, beatings, sexual abuse, chaining, imprisonment, and the deaths of 16 *talibé* children due to abuse, neglect or endangerment.

The report also documents human trafficking and dangers linked to *talibé* migration, including *talibés* abandoned in distant cities and children who end up in the streets after fleeing abusive *daaras*. Some parents perpetuate the abuse by repeatedly returning runaway children to abusive or exploitative *daaras*.

This report calls on the Senegalese government to take urgent action to inspect and regulate *daaras*, protect *talibés* from abuse and forced begging, crack down on the trafficking of *talibé* children, and bring perpetrators to justice. Senegal should also make funding available to *daaras* that respect children’s rights, and take steps to strengthen the under-resourced regional child protection services providing aid to runaway *talibés* and abuse victims.



(above) *Talibé* children take a break at the Maison de la Gare children’s center in Saint-Louis, Senegal, January 14, 2019. Maison de la Gare is a non-profit organization and shelter that supports *talibés*. The text on the mural reads, in French: “We are all responsible.”

(front cover) Two *talibé* children approach cars to beg in the streets of Dakar, Senegal, as viewed from a car mirror, June 21, 2018.

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