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Children's Rights

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Serious Abuses Against Talib Children in Senegal, 2017-2018

Two talib children approach cars to beg in the streets of Dakar, Senegal, as viewed from a car mirror, June 21, 2018. 2018 Lauren Seibert/Human Rights Watch

Dusty, dirty, and often-barefooted boys holding empty tomato cans or plastic bowls as they beg for money remain a common sight in Senegals capital, Dakar, and in many other cities across the country. Most of them are current or runaway *talibs* 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 *talib* 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 *talibs* 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 *talib* told Human Rights Watch: The daily [begging] quota [set by the *marabout*] was 500 francs CFA [US\$0.90] I didnt like the *daara* because they hit us all the time if we didnt memorize the verses of the Quran, or if we didnt 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 *talibs* begging in other regions across the country. Sustained commitment by the Senegalese authorities to stop the forced begging and abuse, ensure justice, and protect *talibs* has proven elusive.

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This report documents scores of serious abuses committed against *talib* 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 Senegals 14 administrative regions (Dakar, Diourbel, Fatick, Kaolack, Louga, Saint-Louis, Tambacounda, and This); 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 *talib* migration, including illicit transport of groups of *talibs* across regions or country borders; cases of *talibs* abandoned by their *marabouts* or parents; and the hundreds of *talibs* who end up in the streets or in childrens 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*.



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Key migration routes of talib children in Senegal. Many talibs travel to Senegal from neighboring countries, including Guinea-Bissau and Gambia.

2010 John Emerson/Human Rights Watch

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Key migration routes of talib children in Senegal. Many talibs travel to Senegal from neighboring countries, including Guinea-Bissau and Gambia.

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 *talibs*, 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 *talib* children since 2009, this report demonstrates that severe abuses remain pervasive despite some government efforts to protect and assist *talibs* 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 Plateformepour la Promotion et laProtectiondesDroits Humains*, PPDH), observed hundreds of*talib* 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 *talibs* 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 *talib*, 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 didnt bring it, the *marabout* whipped us with a cable. Once it injured me on my stomach.

Human Rights Watch documented the deaths of 16 *talib* 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 This. 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.

Human Rights Watch also documented 61 cases of beatings or physical abuse against *talibs* 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 *talibs* with some transported by parents or *marabouts* from one region to another, and some running away from abusive *daaras* many *talibs* 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 *talibs* 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 *talib* 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 *talibs* 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 *talibs* with visible infections or illnesses had not received medical treatment, and 13 *daaras* visited provided little to no food to the children, according to *talib* children and Quranic teachers interviewed.

Despite the continued abuse, neglect and exploitation suffered by many *talib* 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 *talib* children subject to abuse and exploitation across the country. Government initiatives such as social assistance projects for *talibs* 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 *talibs* begging in the streets since 2016, primarily due to efforts by civil society and local government. These include the Dakar municipalities of M'dina and Gueule Tape-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 mayors' 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 *talib* children and end the abuse.

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 *talibs* 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 *talibs* 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 *talib* abuse, forced begging or neglect. This should include all cases where *talib* 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 *talibs* 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 mayors' office or prefecture, which should proactively inspect and close down such *daaras*, as was done in the Dakar municipalities of M'dina and Gueule Tape-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*.

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, Thies, 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 *talibs*, 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 *talibs* 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 *talib* 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 *talib* 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 *talibs* 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 *talibs*, 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 Talibs 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 Talibs Begging: Government Program to Protect Talib 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 *talibs* and child deaths in 2016 and early 2017. Abuse cases occurring in early 2017 that were documented in *I Still See The Talibs Begging* have been included in the 2017-2018 totals for this report.

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 *talibs* 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 *talibs* 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.

Talib 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 *talibs* 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.

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 talibs* the older *talibs*, often age 17 and up, who serve as the teachers' 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*, *talibs* often suffer from both malnutrition and disease.

The total number of *daaras* operating in Senegal is unknown, as is the number of *talibs*. 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 *talibs* 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 *talib* children forced to beg in Senegal to be over 100,000. This number refers only to *talibs* 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 Senegals National Anti-Trafficking Unit counted 1,006 Quranic schools and a total of 54,837 *talibs*, 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 *talibs* in Dakar, of which they reported that 515 *daaras* (26.8 percent) and 27,943 *talibs* (15.2 percent) practiced begging.^[4]

In the religious city of Touba Senegals second largest city, located in Diourbel region GSIs 2018 study found 1,524 *daaras* and 127,822 *talibs*, of which 1,016 *daaras* (66.7 percent) and 85,000 *talibs* (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 mayors office.^[6] but an education expert working for the mayors 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 childrens rights organization Maison de la Gare counted 197 *daaras* and 14,779 begging *talibs*.^[8]

Thousands of *talibs* also beg in other regions across the country, particularly Louga, Diourbel, This, 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]

Senegals 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 childrens 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 Childrens 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.

Senegals 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]

Senegalese legislation does not specifically stipulate a minimum age for sexual consent.^[13] The countrys 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: Senegals 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]

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]

Under Senegals Penal Code, anyone who unlawfully detains or sequesters a person is subject to a penalty of 10-20 years of hard labor.^[20]

Senegals 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]

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

The UN Trafficking Protocol defines human trafficking as:

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

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]

Senegals anti-trafficking law also specifically criminalizes the exploitation of begging:

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 Senegals anti-trafficking law:

The gravity of human trafficking acts involving *talibs* 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.

From June 2018 to January 2019, Human Rights Watch and PPDH observed and spoke with scores of *talibs* 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 *talibs*.^[29] However, as Human Rights Watch reported in July 2017, the programs first phase returned over 1,000 *talibs* 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]

Rollled out only in Dakar during its first two phases, the program failed to reach the tens of thousands of *talib* children subject to forced begging in other regions. In Dakar, numerous social workers and child protection activists particularly those at childrens shelters, which take in large numbers of children from the streets told Human Rights Watch that they saw no decrease in the number of *talibs* begging since the programs launch in 2016. Nothing has evolved. Children are still in the streets, said Alassane Diagne, coordinator of Empire des Enfants childrens center in Dakar.^[32]

Danielle Huges, executive director of Unies Verselle Sngal, which runs the Yakaaru Guneyi childrens 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 *talibs* in Dakar and Saint-Louis. Of these, 83 *talibs* were required to beg for food or money: 60 were observed begging in the streets, and 23, interviewed in childrens shelters, said they had been forced to beg at their former *daaras*. 63 *talibs* 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 *talibs* 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 *talib* who had run away from his *daara* in Dakar. The payment was 500 CFA (\$0.90). If you didnt bring something back, they would beat you the *marabout* or the older *talibs*.^[36]

Another *talib*, 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 dont find it, he beats us.^[37]

In Dakar, social workers at the non-governmental organization (NGO) Enda Jeunesse Actions Day Center for at-risk children told Human Rights Watch that they still regularly helped runaway *talibs* who were exploited by Quranic teachers. They noted that older *talibs*, as the Quranic teachers assistants, both enforce the *marabouts* 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 *talibs* add another 300 CFA (\$0.50) that the child must find, said El Hadji Malick Diop, the center facilitator. The older *talibs* dont beg anymore, but they have their needs, so they make the younger *talibs* bring them money, said Modou Diop, the center manager.^[38]

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 *talibs*] didnt have to beg, because this increases the time it takes them to learn the Quran, said a Quranic teacher in Diourbel whose *talibs* begged for their meals. It should take them two years, but it can take them five years.^[39]

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 childrens parents contributed money toward the care of their child. Nevertheless, they claimed that they could not refuse to accept any *talib* entrusted to them. It became evident in the interviews that some of them also continued to seek new *talibs* by periodically approaching parents in other regions and countries.^[40]

Whether a Quranic teacher uses the money from child begging for the *daaras* expenses or uses it for his own enrichment living with his family in a separate house while the *talib* children live in squalor, as documented by Human Rights Watch in both 2017^[41] and 2018^[42] or some combination of both, the motivation is irrelevant. The act of forcing children to beg for specific quotas of money qualifies as exploitation.

Beyond forced begging, Human Rights Watch documented dozens of cases of physical abuse committed against *talib* 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 *talib* 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 *talib* abuse cases during this period. One social worker in Louga reported that he had assisted as many as 49 runaway *talibs* 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 *talib* 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 *talib* children in their care, which in some cases resulted in deaths.

Human Rights Watch documented the deaths of 16 *talib* 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 *talibs* 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-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.

Three *talib* 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 *talib* died following a beating meted out by a Quranic teachers assistant (*grand talib*) 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 talib* was convicted in November 2017 for the lesser charge of assaultand batterycausingunintentional death, and sentenced to five years hard labor.^[46]

In April 2018, an 11-year-old *talib* 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 *talib* 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 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 *talib* 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 L, 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]

Human Rights Watch documented 13 *talib* 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 *talib* children also suffered burn injuries.

In November 2018, five *talibs* fell ill with malaria in the Cit Niakh district of Saint-Louis while their *marabout* was away traveling. According to social workers and a judicial official, 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 Kouyat, member of the Platformfor the Promotion andProtectionof Human Rights (PPDH) and director of the respected childrens 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 *talib*, as he did in this case. Kouyat called it negligence and stated: We have previously given materials to this *daara*, but if you go 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 *talibs* 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 childrens 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 *talib* 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] Kouyat, whose organization (MDLG) had partnered with a local association of doctors to provide medical assistance to children from this *daara*, recounted:

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 *talibs*, 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 *talibs* had gone to get treatment, according to the doctor.^[59] At time of writing, the Quranic teacher was still operating his *daara*.^[60]

Beyond the health risks posed to the children, some *daaras* are so poorly constructed and poorly supervised that they put *talibs* 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 *talib* children in total.



[Click to expand Image](#)

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. 2018 Malick Sy

In June 2017, a 7-year old *talib* reportedly dropped a lit match and set a *daara* in This alight, leading to his death.^[62] A former government social worker in This 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 shouldnt just take the oldest *talibs* and give them the responsibility of managing the *daara*. As the one in charge, the *marabout* should himself take care of the 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, This region, killing three *talibs* 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:

Ndye 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 *talibs*, to improve the living conditions for *talib* 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 *talib* children in Dakars 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]

Human Rights Watch documented the deaths of at least five *talib* children in traffic accidents in 2017 and 2018, as well as another accident seriously injuring a *talib* in January 2019. The deaths appeared to be a result of the childrens 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 *talib* children a March 2018 accident in Dakar.^[69] and a fatal July 2018 accident in Touba^[70] were reported by the media, but Human Rights Watch was unable to verify these incidents.

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.

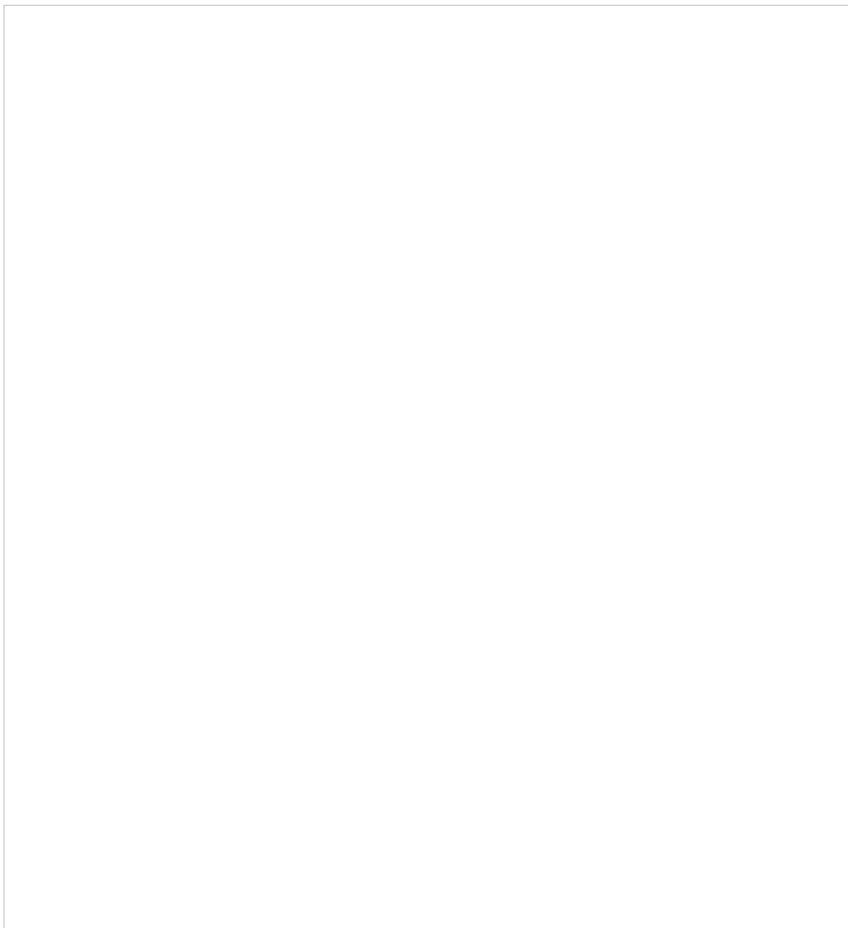
In April 2017, a young *talib* of around 6 or 7 years old was hit by a bus and killed in the Pikine district of Saint-Louis, according to MDLG director Issa Kouyat, who was contacted after the incident by witnesses. He recounted what the witnesses told him:

In November 2017, a 4x4 vehicle hit a young *talib*, 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 childs *ndeye daara* (a woman who helps support the needs of *talibs* in her community), told Human Rights Watch:

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 *talib* 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. Its 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 *talib* child was hit by a car while he was begging and killed in Tivaouane, This region, according to a runaway *talib* 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 *talib* 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 *talib* 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 couldnt sleep it really shocked me. The witness explained that when he went to visit the victims *daara*, the childs brother another *talib* 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 *talibs* to get money. If they dont get the required amount, they are obliged to stay outside in the garden, near the river, in dangerous areas, the witness said.^[78]



[Click to expand Image](#)

The scene of an accident in Louga, Senegal, January 13, 2019, in which a motorcycle hit a talib child in the streets. Every morning, his Quranic teacher sent him and the other talibs out begging for 250 francs CFA (US \$0.40), according to another child from the same Quranic school. 2019 Lauren Seibert / Human Rights Watch

On January 13, 2019, Human Rights Watch and PPDH arrived at the scene of an accident in Louga shortly after a *talib* 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 *talib* 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 *talib* 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 *talibs* were out begging in the streets. The teacher explained that he had around 20 *talibs* at his daara, all from villages in Louga region. ^[80]

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

Of the 61 cases, 43 *talibs* 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 *marabouts* assistants (*grands talibs*) meted out the beatings, either in the presence of the *marabout* or in his absence. A 12-year-old runaway *talib*, 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:

Several *talibs* described being subjected to a method of punishment known as taking by four (*prendre par quatre*) during which at least two older *talibs* restrain the childs limbs as he is beaten. ^[84] A former *talib* 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:

A 13-year-old *talib* who had run away from his *daara* in Touba, interviewed at a childrens center in Dakar, said:

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

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 *talibs* 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 *talibs* 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 *talib* children at the shelter to have suffered abuse. [\[90\]](#) She recounted two cases from 2017:

During a June 2018 visit by Human Rights Watch to a *daara* in Saint-Louis with Issa Kouyat, director of the MDLG childrens center, Kouyat said that he saw the older *talibs* holding whips. He noted that several of the younger children had previously come to his center with injuries and marks indicative of beatings.[\[92\]](#)

Human Rights Watch documented 14 cases of *talib* 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 *talib* for attempting to run away, and some children were locked up for weeks or even months.

Four cases were recounted by *talibs* interviewed at childrens centers in Dakar and Saint-Louis; eight cases were described to Human Rights Watch by staff members of childrens 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 *talib* interviewed in Dakar, who had spent several years at a Quranic school in Touba, described being chained up in 2017 and earlier:

A former *talib* 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 *talibs*, in the years leading up to and during 2017:

A 14-year-old *talib* who often spent his afternoons at a childrens center in Saint-Louis told Human Rights Watch that his *marabout* had brought him with a group of Guinean *talibs* to Saint-Louis. The *marabout* asked the *talibs* 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 dont bring the payment, if we dont want to go out begging, or if we do badly in our studies.[\[96\]](#)

A runaway *talib*, around 7 or 8 years old, interviewed by Human Rights Watch at another childrens 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 region. If I didnt 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 didnt bring the money.[\[97\]](#)

Seven cases of *talibs* tied, chained or locked up were reported by staff of childrens centers in Dakar, Saint-Louis and Diourbel. The social coordinator of a childrens 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:

He described another similar case, involving a 13-year-old *talib* 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 centers 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 *talib* child who had arrived at the center in 2017:

In Saint-Louis, Issa Kouyat told Human Rights Watch about a case involving a runaway *talib* estimated to be between 9 and 11 years old. The child, found by Kouyat in early June 2018, said he had been tied up at the *daara*. Intending to investigate, Kouyat accompanied the child back to the *daara*, where the childs 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 wasnt there, Kouyat said. The *talib* 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 childrens center, a staff member told Human Rights Watch that they had taken in a 17-year-old *talib* 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 childrens center said that they received three *talibs* 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 *talib*, 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 thats when they called us.[\[104\]](#) She also described another similar case: a 12-year-old *talib* 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*.[\[105\]](#)

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 *talib*. 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 Id 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.[\[106\]](#)

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 *talib* in a room for several months. Dan Boubou Cissokho, the Tambacounda AEMO coordinator who handled the case, said:

According to a document from the prosecutors office of the Tambacounda High Court, the accused admitted having, in an episodic manner, subjected his *talib* 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 *talibs* in recent years, such abusive practices persist, as the above cases demonstrate. The childrens evidence also highlight the existence of extremely abusive *daaras* committing multiple serious violations forcing *talibs* to beg, administering beatings, and tying or locking them up in multiple regions across the country.

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 *talibs*), implicated in attacks against six children.

Five of these cases took place in 2018, in This, 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 *talib* witness, two were reported by a judicial official, one was reported by the director of a childrens 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 Senegals 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 talibs*, but did not provide specific evidence or information.[\[111\]](#)

In June 2018, a runaway *talib* of around 15 or 16 years old told Human Rights Watch how he had seen at least two *talib* boys at his *daara* in Touba, Diourbel region sexually assaulted by older *talibs*. 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 *talibs* tried to make love with the youngest ones, he said. I didnt experience this, but there were some *talibs* who were forced to do this. If they didnt, the older *talibs* 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 childrens 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 *talib* 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.[\[113\]](#)

According to a judicial official in Diourbel and media reports, in December 2017, a Quranic teacher from the Mdinatoul 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*. [\[114\]](#)

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 Nioro department of Kaolack region, a *grand talib* just under the age of 18 allegedly raped three girls between the ages of 7 and 12 who attended his Quranic school. The *grand talib* 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, This region, had been arrested for sexually abusing one of his *talibs*, 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.[\[119\]](#)

Human Rights Watch was also informed of two incidents in which *talibs* 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 *talib* 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:

While the perpetrator was prosecuted, there was reportedly no formal investigation into the Quranic teacher as to why his *talib* 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 Kouyat witnessed and intervened to stop the rape of an 8-year-old *talib* boy in a

corner of the Saint-Louis bus station.[\[124\]](#) Kouyat told Human Rights Watch that the perpetrator was a teenager who worked at the station. He recounted:

Kouyat said he reported the incident to the police, who deferred the situation to AEMO social services. However, he said the child *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.[\[126\]](#)

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 *talib* 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*.

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 *talibs* in conditions of extreme squalor, often in unfinished or abandoned buildings missing walls, floors or windows. At many of the *daaras*, some *talibs* regularly slept outside, exposed to the elements and to malaria-carrying mosquitos. I couldnt tell you how many children sleep in a room there are so many that its 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, 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 *talibs*, 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 *talibs* 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 *talib* in Touba, he returned to his village to collect *talibs* to bring back to Touba. None of the childrens parents contributed to the *daara*, which supported itself entirely on child begging. These young *talibs* 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 *talibs*, but the Quranic teacher was unable to provide the exact number. He said that the *talibs* 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 dont have enough mats, and there is not enough space on the mats, so some of the children have to sleep laid on top of each other, he said.[\[130\]](#) The *daara*, lodged in a compound of old, crumbling buildings that were soon be torn down, contained no working toilets and reportedly flooded during the rainy season. Human Rights Watch observed three sick *talib* 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 *talibs* 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.

Sometimes they cough all night, he said. [\[132\]](#) Yet the *talibs* 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 *talibs* 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 *talibs* 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 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 *talibs* had been brought to Louga town from villages in Louga and This regions. With no support from the parents, the *marabout* said the children supported the *daara* through their begging. [\[136\]](#)

Many of the *talibs* 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 *talib* 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 *talibs*; 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 *talibs* 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. [\[140\]](#)

In Dakar, a 10-year-old *talib* 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.[\[141\]](#)

In Saint-Louis in June 2018, Human Rights Watch spoke with one young *talib* 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 childrens 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 *talib* (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 *talibs* died of malaria after not receiving treatment in time.

Staff at both government-run and non-governmental childrens shelters and reception centers in multiple cities told Human Rights Watch that *talibs* 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 *talibs* 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 childrens 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 *talib* children at the time of visit.

In Dakar, Empire des Enfants center took in 254 children in 2017, including 174 *talibs*; in 2018, they assisted 139 children, including 84 *talibs* who were victims of exploitation by forced begging. [\[147\]](#) In 2018, Yakaaru Guneyi center took in 338 children, including 162 *talibs*, 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 *talibs*, with similar figures in 2018 (832 children assisted, including 417 current or former *talibs*). [\[149\]](#) Ginddi Center hosted 35 children, including 21 *talibs*, at the time of visit in January 2019. [\[150\]](#)

In Diourbel, a teacher at a government-run childrens center explained why *talibs* end up at the center:

The Center of First Reception (CPA) in Saint-Louis had the largest percentage of *talibs*, 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:

Human Rights Watch research suggests that hundreds of *talib* children in 2017 and 2018 were victims of human trafficking, which under Senegalese law includes the act of harboring of children in *adaara* 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 *talib* children are trafficking victims, said Modou Diop, manager of the Enda Jeunesse Action childrens 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 *talib* children migrate to Senegals 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 *talibs*. [\[156\]](#)

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 *talib* children from rural areas to the city: because they themselves were brought from the village to the city as young children to become *talibs*; because they saw the city as a center of religious learning and scholarship; and for economic reasons. [\[158\]](#) Recruiting *talib* 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 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 Actions Senegal office reported to Human Rights Watch that *talibs* 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 *talibs*. [\[161\]](#) In 2018, 110 of the 128 children Enda returned were *talibs*, 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 PPDHs findings illustrate, the many complex and overlapping problems associated with the movement of *talib* 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.

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, This, 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 *talibs* they had, including those from outside Senegal. In Saint-Louis, one teacher said, Its 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 *talibs* 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 Kbmer, 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 the Louga public prosecutors office, while Lougas AEMO social services office took charge of the children.[\[170\]](#)

A document from the Kbmer 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:

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 *talib* children regularly migrating across Senegals 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 Kbmer and held for a week-long investigation is an encouraging sign of increased vigilance regarding child trafficking in 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 *talibs* 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 *talib* 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 governments 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:

Some *talib* 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 *talib* children between the ages of 12 and 15 stranded in Saint-Louis when he decided to move his *daara* to another town. Issa Kouyat, who received the children at the Maison de la Gare center, described what happened:

Additionally, hundreds of *talib* 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 *talib* 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 *talibs* forcibly recruited by armed groups in neighboring Mali have been documented by the UN and cited by other child protection experts in central Mali.[\[178\]](#)

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 childrens living expenses, and without verifying that children are treated well. In many cases, *talibs* lose contact with their parents for years; some are effectively abandoned. While some *marabouts* keep the contact information of the childrens parents and facilitate communication between them, others make no effort to do so.[\[179\]](#)

At a state-run childrens center in Diourbel that occasionally takes in runaway *talibs*, a teacher told Human Rights Watch: Some families send *talibs* 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].[\[181\]](#)

In Dakar, three *talib* 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 *talib*, 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 *talibs* 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 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 Mdina, Dakar.[\[185\]](#)

In other cases, when *talibs* 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 governments 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 *talibs* interviewed by Human Rights Watch in childrens centers reported having run away from *daaras* more than once after being returned by their families.[\[186\]](#)

In Saint-Louis, a Juvenile Court official told Human Rights Watch that she had ordered the return of numerous *talib* 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 childrens centers including Ginddi and Empire des Enfants described how some *talibs* 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 childrens center a second time.[\[188\]](#) According to Alassane Diagne, coordinator of Empire des Enfants childrens 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 *talib* 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 didnt respect their word, [and] they placed him back in the *daara* [in Dakar]. As for another runaway *talib* in mid-2017, who also said he had been beaten at the *daara*: He gave us a false name because he didnt 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 *talib* 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.[\[192\]](#)

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

This report was researched and written by Lauren Seibert, a Fellow in the Africa Division at Human Rights Watch. Members of *la Plateforme pour la Promotion et la Protection des Droits Humains* (PPDH), a Senegalese coalition of human rights organizations, helped arrange visits to *daaras* and facilitated interviews with Quranic teachers and local authorities. The report was edited by Corinne Dufka, Associate Director in the Africa Division. Elin Martinez, Childrens Rights Researcher; Clive Baldwin, Senior Legal Advisor; and Babatunde Olugboji, Deputy Program Director, provided thematic, legal and programmatic review respectively. Production assistance was provided by Fitzroy Hepkins, Administrative Manager.

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TERMINOLOGY

Quranic students

Talib

A disciple or student of the Quran. *Talibs* 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 *daaras*. Some *talib* children live with family and attend Quranic schools during the day. Most female *talibs* are day students that do not live at the Quranic schools.

Grand talib

An older *talib*, typically age 17 and above, who often serves as the Quranic teachers assistant. Sometimes called a young *marabout*.

Quranic schools

Daara

Used interchangeably with Quranic school to refer to the traditional Muslim schools in which *talib* 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 *marabouts* repute, *daaras* can host from less than a dozen to hundreds or thousands of *talibs*. Most *daaras* remain unregulated.

Many Senegalese civil society activists and religious authorities routinely refer to the abusive and exploitative *daaras* as so-called Quranic schools or self-proclaimed Quranic schools, to distinguish them from the thousands of *daaras* 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.

Daara internat

A residential Quranic school, often providing lodging to *talibs* from other regions or countries. Many practice child begging.

Daara externat

A Quranic day school attended by children in the local community. These *daaras* generally do not practice child begging.

Mixed daara

Quranic schools that accept both external (day) and internal (boarding school) students. Some of these practice begging.

Modern daara

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

Marabout

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 *marabouts* (which traditionally refers to Muslim leaders, teachers or holy men).

Community Volunteers

Ndeye daara

A woman who serves as a community volunteer supporting a *daara* by providing food or other assistance to several *talib* children.

Government Program

Retrait /

Retrait de la rue

Short for the Senegalese government program, launched in 2016, known in Senegal in French as *le retrait des enfants de la rue* (the removal of children from the streets).

ACRONYMS

AEMO

Non-Institutional Educational Action agency (*Action éducative en milieu ouvert*, AEMO) 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 (*Comité Départemental de Protection de l'Enfant*).

CPA

Center of First Reception (*Centre de Premier Accueil*) state-run childrens 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 (*la Plateforme pour la Promotion et la Protection des Droits Humains*) 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.

[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 Talibs in Senegal*, April 15, 2010, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2010/04/15/back-children/forced-begging-and-other-abuses-against-talibs-senegal#>, p. 14-23.

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[7] Human Rights Watch interview with education expert, Touba mayors office, Touba, Senegal, January 8, 2019.

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[11] Rpublique du Sngal, Code Pnal, 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).

[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] Rpublique du Sngal, Code Pnal, Loi no. 99-05 du 29 janvier 1999 modifiant certaines dispositions du Code pnal, 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] Rpublique du Sngal, Code Pnal, 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).

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- [19] Rpublique du Sngal, Code Pnal, 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] Rpublique du Sngal, Code Pnal, Loi no. 2016-29 du 8 novembre 2016 modifiant la loi no. 65-60 du 21 juillet 1965 portant Code Pnal, art. 307 bis.
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- [23] UN Trafficking Protocol, art. 3(a) and 3(c).
- [24] Rpublique du Sngal, Loi n 2005-06 du 10 Mai 2005 relative la lutte contre la traite des personnes, art. 1 (unofficial translation by Human Rights Watch).
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- [26] Rpublique du Sngal, Loi n 2005-06 du 10 Mai 2005 relative la lutte contre la traite des personnes, art. 3 (unofficial translation by Human Rights Watch).
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- [28] Ministry of Women, Family, and Children, Etat des lieux des initiatives de lutte contre la mendicité des enfants talibs au Sngal, March 2017 (document on file with Human Rights Watch).
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- [30] Human Rights Watch, *I Still See the Talibs Begging*.
- [31] Human Rights Watch interview with government official, former Ministry of Good Governance and Child Protection, June 21, 2018.
- [32] Human Rights Watch interview with Alassane Diagne, coordinator, Empire des Enfants childrens center, Dakar, Senegal, June 18, 2018.
- [33] Human Rights Watch interview with Danielle Huges, executive director, Unies Verselle Sngal, Dakar, Senegal, June 21, 2018.
- [34] Human Rights Watch interviews with *talib* children, Dakar and Saint-Louis, Senegal, June 2018, December 2018 and January 2019.
- [35] Human Rights Watch interview with 8- or 9-year-old *talib*, Saint-Louis, Senegal, June 28, 2018.
- [36] Human Rights Watch interview with 9-year-old runaway *talib*, Dakar, Senegal, June 21, 2018.
- [37] Human Rights Watch interview with 8-year-old *talib*, Dakar, Senegal, June 19, 2018.
- [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.
- [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 Talibs Begging*, 2017, p. 32-34.
- [42] Human Rights Watch interview with Quranic teacher in Dakar, Senegal, June 23, 2018.
- [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 *talib* 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.
- [45] This case was previously documented in: Human Rights Watch, *I Still See The Talibs 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 Talibs Begging*, p. 27.
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- [48] Human Rights Watch interview with judicial official, Saint-Louis High Court, Senegal, June 28, 2018.
- [49] Ibid.
- [50] Saint-Louis Court of Appeals, Prosecutors Office, Etat Traite des Personnes, 2018 (on file with Human Rights Watch).
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- [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 Kouyat, 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 Kouyat, director, Maison de la Gare, Saint-Louis, Senegal, December 20, 2018.
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[77] Human Rights Watch interview with 10 or 11-year-old runaway *talib*, Dakar, Senegal, January 3, 2019.

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

[79] Human Rights Watch interview with *talib* witness, Louga, Senegal, January 13, 2019.

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

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

[82] Two of these cases were previously documented in *I Still See The Talibs Begging*, p. 27-29.

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

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

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

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

[87] Human Rights Watch interview with social coordinator of a childrens 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.

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

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

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[100] Human Rights Watch interview with social coordinator of a childrens center in Dakar, Senegal, June 22, 2018.

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

[102] Human Rights Watch interview with staff member at a childrens center in Saint-Louis, Senegal, June 29, 2018.

[103] Human Rights Watch interview with specialized educator at a state-run childrens 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.

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

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

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[109] See: Human Rights Watch, *I Still See The Talibs Begging*, p. 31-32.

[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 *talib*, Dakar, Senegal, June 26, 2018.

[113] Human Rights Watch interviews with childrens center director in Dakar, Senegal, June 27, 2018 and April 6, 2019.

[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 Talib, *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).

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Government Program to Protect Talib Children in Senegal Falls Short

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