

Senegal: The State must move from commitment to strong action to protect talibé children



The Senegalese authorities must meet their obligations and take action to end violations of the rights of children often referred to as *talibé* (studying in Quranic schools commonly known as *daaras*), Amnesty International said today in a new [briefing](#).

The economic exploitation of *talibé* children through forced begging, which constitutes a form of trafficking, the corporal punishment they suffer, and their difficult living conditions are violations of their rights to physical integrity, health and to a life free from violence, physical or mental harm and brutality, abandonment or neglect, abuse and exploitation.

Senegal has repeatedly pledged to put an end to forced begging by talibés and to improve the living conditions in daaras. Efforts have been made in this regard, but they remain insufficient. The government needs to do more, in consultation with all stakeholders, to end the suffering of talibé children.

Samira Daoud, Regional Director for West and Central Africa, Amnesty International

Talibés children are entrusted by their families – sometimes at a very early age – to Quranic teachers to learn the Quran. Common in urban centres, they are often forced to beg for their own upkeep and that of their Quranic master. There are no official statistics on the number of *talibé* children, but it is nevertheless estimated that there are more than 2,000 *daaras* in Dakar, with a population of nearly 200,000 *talibés*. Twenty-five percent (25%) of these are thought to be forced to beg, according to a mapping exercise published by the NGO Global Solidarity Initiative (GSI) in 2018.

Abuse of all kinds

The unsanitary conditions in many *daaras* and the lack of interest in the well-being of the children shown by some Quranic teachers results in serious malnutrition and health problems.

“Health is a serious problem in the *daaras*, especially skin diseases and oral hygiene. These children often have huge abscesses in their mouths which are not treated because there is no real monitoring of their welfare,” says the head of an NGO working to protect *talibé* children.

Talibé children also face abuse from some Quranic teachers and their assistants. Quranic teachers confirmed to Amnesty International that shackling is a common practice, particularly for runaways, in order to prevent their escape.

In January 2022, a 10-year-old *talibé* died of his injuries in the Lansar district of Touba after being beaten by his Quranic teacher, who was reprimanding him for not having learned the day’s lesson. Such violence often goes unpunished, largely because of a lack of control over the *daaras*, insufficient resources for child protection services, and the status Quranic teachers enjoy within society.

“When I was a *talibé*, one of my classmates in the same *daara* as me had a stutter and did not have good diction. One day, as he was struggling to recite, the schoolmaster hit him over the head with a wooden tablet. He died two days later. Now that I’m older and myself providing care to the children, I realize he must have died of a brain haemorrhage after that beating,” said a former *talibé* child.

A system of human trafficking

This phenomenon of forced begging by *talibé* children is based on a system that recruits not only within the country but also sub-regionally, with Quranic teachers and *talibé* children coming from neighbouring countries such as the Gambia and Guinea Bissau. This often amounts to a system of trafficking of children for the purpose of their economic exploitation. The Coordinator of the Project to Combat the Exploitation and Begging of *Talibé* Children (PLEMET), Issa Saka, revealed in 2016 that the phenomenon was [likely to bring in 5,475 billion FCFA](#) per year for Quranic teachers in the Dakar region alone.

According to the Law to combat human trafficking and related practices and on victim protection, adopted by Senegal in 2005, “Anyone who organizes the begging of others with a view to profiting therefrom, who hires, trains or misdirects a person with a view to handing them over to begging or pressuring them to beg or to continue to do so, shall be punished by imprisonment of 2 to 5 years and a fine of between 500,000 and 2,000,000 FCFA.” There is, however, little enforcement of this law.

Inadequate child protection programmes

Condemned by the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and singled out by international and regional human rights bodies for failing to protect the rights of *talibé* children, the Senegalese authorities have embarked on programmes to create modern *daaras* and modernize traditional *daaras*, as well as programmes to remove children from the streets.

These projects nevertheless suffer from poor conceptualization and insufficient funding, and only partially meet the protection needs of *talibé* children, as confirmed to Amnesty International by those involved in the child protection sector.

An unimplemented and incomplete legal framework

One of the reasons for the persistent violations of the rights of *talibé* children relates to the failure to apply conventions and laws for the protection of children, as well as the absence of a regulatory framework for *daaras*. Senegal has ratified several international and regional conventions protecting children's rights, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Constitution and various national laws also protect children from trafficking and abuse.

However, these regulations fail to be properly enforced due to social pressure. A draft law on the status of the “*daara*”, which aims to incorporate these institutions into the national education system, was validated by the Council of Ministers in June 2018 but has still not been tabled for consideration by the National Assembly. Some Quranic teachers view this project as an anti-Islamic attack and are lobbying against the adoption of this law.

An important draft Children's Code also remains blocked due to pressure from conservative quarters.

In light of this situation, Amnesty International is recommending actions to combat the abuse of *talibé* children and strengthen child protection. The Senegalese authorities need to conduct a mapping exercise of the Quranic schools and the number of *talibé* children studying in them to understand the extent of the phenomenon; increase funding for its *daara* modernization and child protection programmes; adopt the draft Children's Code and the law on the status of the “*daara*”; and enforce the Criminal Code and the law on trafficking in order to prosecute perpetrators of abuse and organizers of forced begging.

Faced with the suffering of many talibé children, we are calling on the authorities to take strong action by adopting the draft Children's Code and the law on the status of the “daara”. By defying conservative resistance, they will be demonstrating to everyone that protecting the future generation is a government priority that goes beyond mere words.
Seydi Gassama, Executive Director, Amnesty International Senegal