



# Senegal fails to stop abuse of children in Qur'anic schools

A year on from a government crackdown, children have been sent back to abusive teachers and once again are being sent out to beg, says report

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**Kate Lyons**

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Tens of thousands of children in Senegal are still being forced to beg for their food by abusive teachers in Qur'anic schools, a year after the government began a crackdown on the issue, according to a survey.

A report from Human Rights Watch (HRW) found that most of the children picked up on the streets by the authorities were later returned to the schoolteachers who had sent them out soliciting in the first place.

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There had not been a single arrest or prosecution in connection with the widespread practice, despite hundreds of children telling police officers they had been victims.

Senegal has been under considerable international pressure to stop abuses against children - called *talibé* - who are sent by their families, often far from their homes, to get an education at Islamic schools (*daaras*). But many such schools then abuse the children in their care, sending them out to beg and punishing them harshly if they do not bring back a certain amount of money or food.

In 2010, HRW estimated that 50,000 talibé children were begging on the streets in Senegal, though a 2014 report from the Senegalese government indicates the number could be even higher.

Roughly half of the children interviewed for the report (19 out of 43) said they were beaten if they did not study or failed to bring back quotas of food or money. The schools are also notorious for unsafe living conditions, physical and sexual abuse, and neglect. In December a child died in a fire which broke out at his school after his teacher left him chained up inside. Another talibé was allegedly beaten to death in Diourbel in March.

“The saddest part of the talibé problem is that it puts the child in such a vulnerable situation - kids being beaten, being sexually abused or being chained inside daraas because they haven’t been able to bring back the money,” said Jim Wormington, West Africa researcher for HRW.

In June last year, Senegal’s president, Macky Sall, announced a programme to end child begging, involving police and social workers gathering up street children in Dakar and taking them to a government-run centre where they were cared for and reunited with their parents.

The initiative initially appeared to work, with 1,547 children leaving the streets of Dakar between June 2016 and March 2017, including 1,089 talibés. However, due to lack of resources to care for them, most were then sent back to their Qur’anic teachers.

Aid workers and government officials told HRW that in the month following the government’s announcement, there was a significant reduction in the number of children seen begging on the city streets of Dakar and Saint-Louis. But as it became clear that no prosecutions would follow, the numbers soon returned to the same level.

“This problem has been entrenched within Senegalese society for decades,” said Wormington. “It’s extremely welcome that the government is now prioritising it, what we’re saying is that the first pilot phase needs to be learned from and there needs to be an increased focus on investigating the Qur’anic teachers who are driving the process.”

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