

Time for Change:

A call for urgent action to end the forced child begging of
talibés in Senegal

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Written by: Catherine Turner
Design and layout by: Jakub Sobik
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Contents

Introduction.....	2
1. Forced child begging: one of the worst forms of child labour.....	3
2. The causes of forced child begging by <i>talibés</i>.....	5
Poverty.....	5
Religious culture.....	6
State education.....	6
3. International and regional legal framework.....	8
International framework.....	8
Slavery, servitude and practices similar to slavery.....	8
Forced labour.....	8
Child labour and exploitation.....	9
Child trafficking.....	10
Regional framework.....	10
4. The Government response to date.....	11
Legal framework.....	11
Law No. 2005-6 to Combat Trafficking in Persons and Related Practices and to Protect Victims.....	11
The Criminal Code.....	11
Law enforcement.....	12
Government policy.....	12
5. Conclusions and recommendations.....	15
Appendix: Background to Senegal.....	18

Introduction

Talibé children, some as young as five years old, are a common sight in Senegal's urban centres. Bare-footed and wearing rags, they beg at tourist attractions, religious sites and weave between the cars that make up the many traffic jams in cities across the country.

Unlike other street children, *talibés* are almost exclusively boys, who study in Koranic schools (*daaras*) under Koranic teachers and/or *marabouts*. Most Koranic masters do not charge students for their studies, meals or accommodation. Instead, they force the children to spend an average of five hours a day begging in the street for their food and keep, on top of time spent learning the Koran by rote.

There are no reliable statistics for how many *talibés* beg in Senegal, but they clearly number in their tens of thousands. UNICEF estimated that there were 100,000 children living and/or working on the streets in Senegal, the majority of whom are thought to be *talibés*. Most recently, Human Rights Watch reported that at least 50,000 *talibés* are subjected to slavery-like conditions in *daaras* in Senegal.

A joint agency study in 2007 found 7,600 children begging in Dakar, of whom 90 per cent were *talibés*. In addition, it noted that 95 per cent of the children were not from Dakar; just over half came from other regions of Senegal, and the rest mainly from Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Mali and The Gambia.

Poverty and its causes and consequences go some way to explaining this situation. Research also shows that parents in Senegal value Koranic teaching, but at the moment, this is generally only available in the informal education sector.

Consequently, *daaras* are not funded, run or regulated by the State in terms of curriculum or conditions. Furthermore, the State-run education system is inaccessible to many. Often, it appears that Koranic teachings of charity and humility, and a supposed lack of alternative funding, are interpreted as sanction for some teachers to coerce young children into begging on the streets, often through violence.

Forced child begging constitutes a gross violation of children's rights. The sheer and evident scale of the *talibé* problem in Senegal should put tackling the problem once and for all firmly at the top of the Government's agenda.

¹ See for example, "In Senegal, UNICEF and partners work to end the practice of child beggars," UNICEF, 16 July 2006, http://www.unicef.org/protection/senegal_34961.html.

² Human Rights Watch, *Sur le Dos des Enfants: Mendicité forcée et autres mauvais traitements à l'encontre des talibés au Sénégal* ("Off the Backs of Children: Forced begging and other abuses against talibés in Senegal"), USA (2010), page 2.

³ International Labour Organization, UNICEF, World Bank, *Enfants mendiants dans la région de Dakar*, Understanding Children's Work Project Working Paper Series, (2007).

1. Forced child begging: one of the worst forms of child labour

“The Koranic master will beat us if we do not beg.”⁴

A *talibé*'s story

Seydou* is 15 years old and has lived in the *daara* for seven years. Recently one of his younger brothers came to join him. Seydou usually wakes up at 6am and spends the first hour of the day learning the Koran. Then, with an empty tin can, he goes from one house to another to beg for food for his breakfast. He returns to the *daara* at 9am, at which time the morning courses begin. At 1pm Seydou goes to neighbouring houses to beg for his lunch, coming back to the *daara* for an hour or so to rest and eat. The afternoon classes begin at 3pm. At around 5pm every day, Seydou goes to collect water for the *daara* with other *talibés*. He then studies the Koran for another three hours, before going out at 8pm to beg for his dinner. He comes back to the *daara* to study the Koran some more before bed time at around 10pm. He sleeps in a small hut with a straw roof alongside seven other children. Seydou says that if he doesn't beg, he won't eat, and if he doesn't bring back enough money on two or three occasions, his Koranic master will beat him. He misses his parents and would rather be at home with them than in the *daara*. He says that he likes learning the Koran, but would also like to know some French so that he could read road signs.⁵

* Name has been changed.

The violations typically suffered by *talibé* children have been widely documented: *talibés* are poorly educated and socially ill-equipped for future life. Most come from remote rural areas of Senegal or are trafficked from neighbouring countries, including Mali and Guinea-Bissau. These children are highly vulnerable because they are entirely dependent on the *daara* and their Koranic teacher or *marabout*. Far from their parents

and villages and living in squalid conditions, these children are impoverished, vulnerable to disease and poor nutrition and subject to physical and emotional abuse if they fail to meet their financial 'quota' from begging. They are also at risk of traffic accidents and suffer feelings of humiliation and unhappiness from being forced to beg. Children fleeing *daaras* because of corporal punishment often end up living on the streets.⁶

“Me, I don't want to beg, I only want to learn.... It is very humiliating.”⁷

⁴ Ten year-old *talibé* quoted in Emily Delap, *Begging for Change: Research findings and recommendations on forced child begging in Albania/Greece, India and Senegal*, Anti-Slavery International, London (2009), page 10.

⁵ *Ibid*, page 11.

⁶ See also for example, *ibid*; Human Rights Watch, *supra* note 3; the reports of the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (2009 to 2011); the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the Second Periodic Report of Senegal, October 2006 (CRC/C/SEN/CO/2); Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, Najat Maalla M'jid, Mission to Senegal, 28 December 2010 (A/HRC/16/57/Add.3); US Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, *Trafficking in Persons Reports* (2008 to 2011); the US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, *Human Rights Reports* (2007 to 2009).

⁷ Ten year-old *talibé* interviewed as part of the research for *Begging for Change*, *supra* note 5.



Photo: Emilie Régier

Some examples of violence and abuse by Koranic masters towards *talibés* which reached the courts include:

- October 2009: One Senegalese religious teacher was awaiting trial for physically abusing boys who had been trafficked for forced begging. He had been arrested with another religious master.
- June 2009: One Senegalese man was sentenced by the Regional Court of Diourbel to a maximum of ten years for rape and paedophilia committed against 25 victims, including students in the Koranic school he managed in Touba.
- May 2009: A Senegalese man was arrested and facing trial for trafficking boys from Guinea-Bissau, physically abusing them and forcing them to beg.
- December 2008: A Koranic master from Gambia was arrested for torture and ill-treatment of a *talibé*, aged seven years old.
- November 2008: A Koranic master was sentenced to five years' imprisonment (to serve a minimum of three years) and a fine of 300,000 CFA⁸ (US\$ 627)⁹ for corporal ill-treatment of a boy aged eight years old in Kaolack.¹⁰

⁸ CFA designates the African Financial Community franc used in Senegal.

⁹ Equivalent US dollar amounts calculated on the basis of exchange rate as on 12 October 2011.

¹⁰ As reported by the US Department of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons in *Trafficking in Persons Reports* (2008 to 2010) and by the US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor in *Human Rights Reports* (2008 to 2010).

2. The causes of forced child begging by *talibés*

Forced child begging and squalid conditions are clearly not intrinsic to Koranic schooling; nor are they inherent aspects of the “*daara* system.” When *daaras* were established many centuries ago, begging played only a minor role in ensuring the upkeep of the *daara* and in teaching children lessons in humility. It was only with the move to urban centres in the 1970s that begging began to take up a significant part of a *talibé*’s time. Droughts and a decline in commodity prices made it harder both for parents to contribute to costs and Koranic masters to gain an adequate income from the land. Today, the causes of forced child begging by *talibés* in Senegal are therefore many and complex.

Poverty

High levels of poverty mean that parents, particularly in rural areas and neighbouring countries, are rarely able to provide any resources to Koranic masters in return for teaching the Koran to their sons.

“We send our children away to protect them from the crisis at home... It’s a way to lessen our poverty.”¹¹

Poverty is frequently also used by Koranic masters to justify making *talibés* go out to beg:

“If they don’t beg, they don’t have anything to eat or to give to me.”¹²



Photo: Emile Régner

Poverty alone cannot explain this form of exploitation on the part of Koranic masters. Evidence suggests that some Koranic masters gain far in excess of the income needed to maintain their *daaras* and earn a basic living from children begging. For example, Human Rights Watch has estimated that potential annual incomes from four “representative” *daaras* in different parts of the country, ranged from a modest 1,820,000 CFA (US\$ 3,806) to a lavish 53,430,000 CFA (US\$ 111,736) at a *daara* in Guédiawaye with over 150 *talibés*; this, in a country where the average primary school teacher earns 125,000 CFA (US \$261) per month.¹³

¹¹ Father of a *talibé*, Emily Delap, *supra* note 5, page 14.

¹² *Marabout* in Thiès, interviewed as part of the research for *Begging for Change*, *supra* note 5.

¹³ Human Rights watch, *op cit.*, pages 68-9.

Religious culture

A strong desire for their children to learn the Koran is a key reason for many parents to send their children to *daaras*. Learning the Koran is seen to be very important and the *daara* system is deeply entrenched in Senegalese society. *Marabouts* and Koranic teachers are highly respected figures. They are influential in community and political life.

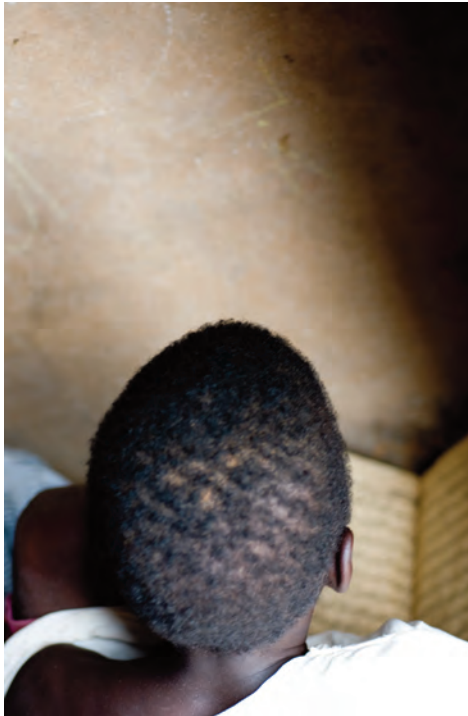


Photo: Emilie Régier

“Every individual must learn the Koran because it is the Koran that brings one to God.”¹⁴

In addition, begging offers a means by which the wider population within Senegal can fulfil religious and traditional obligations to give as part of *Zakat*.¹⁵

“In religion it is clear: we must give to everyone who is in need. The *talibés* fit this.”¹⁶

Members of the general public who give to *talibés* have a range of motives for doing so. These include that: *talibés* are always present and so it is considered convenient to give to them; as children, *talibés* are thought to be closer to God; and it is considered to be a way to support Koranic masters and help *talibés* obtain an education.¹⁷

State education

Local State schools are effectively inaccessible to large numbers of children, in many cases being located several kilometres away and involving unaffordable costs for poorer families. Even when State schools are available, they generally do not incorporate Koranic education.¹⁸ Moreover, as *daaras* fall outside the “formal” education sector, there is no regulatory framework yet in place to protect the children who attend them from

¹⁴ Mother of a *talibé* interviewed as part of the research for *Begging for Change*, *supra* note 5.

¹⁵ *Zakat* (alms) is the obligation under Islam for individuals to give from their wealth to the neediest of Muslims. *Talibés* are said to enable people to fulfil this function. The word *Zakat* is from *Zakaa* which means, “to increase, purify and bless”.

¹⁶ Man in Thiès who gives to *talibés*, interviewed for *Begging for Change*, *supra* note 5, page 17.

¹⁷ Individuals who give to *talibés*, interviewed as part of the research for *Begging for Change*, *supra* note 5.

¹⁸ Senegalese State schools (*Ecoles Françaises*) are secular. There are also schools known as Franco-Arabic schools (*Ecoles Franco-Arabes*), where children are taught the Koran alongside a wider curriculum. These operate in either the State or private sector, but all are recognised by the State. Children are taught the Koran in Arabic alongside the formal curriculum and are not required to spend time begging. Currently, there are relatively few Franco-Arabic schools in number: in 2009, it was predicted that in 2010 there would be 179 in the public sector in addition to 233 that were already privately run and recognised by the State at that time. It is also worth noting that the children who currently attend these schools tend to come from families with greater means, live locally to the school and return home at the end of the school day. This is unlike most child *talibés* who are typically sent away to *daaras* in the cities far from their homes in rural areas.

exploitation and abuse, nor to set and monitor educational standards so that they offer a wider curriculum.

This lack of State provision is despite the fact that many parents and children would prefer to combine Koranic schooling with a broader education to enhance job prospects and make children better equipped for later life.

“We must teach French to our children... Now, there are a lot of changes to our tradition and way of life. If you don’t learn French, you will have problems if you go to the towns.”¹⁹



Photo: Emilie Régier

Mother of a *talibé*

Galadio* lives in a village in the St Louis/Fouta region. She has one 17 year-old son, Alassane*, who lives in a *daara* in Thiès. She also has another son aged ten, Baïdy*, who herds cattle and still lives with the family in the village. When her youngest daughter grows up and can look after the cattle, Galadio thinks she will send Baïdy to the *daara* too. They are a poor family and sometimes cannot eat in the morning or evening because they do not have enough money to have three meals a day.

Galadio’s husband decided to send Alassane to the *daara* when he was seven years old. She felt sad to see him go but thought it was the best thing for Alassane and for the family.

Galadio has never visited Alassane during his ten years in the *daara*, and her husband went only once. She was aware that *talibés* were sent out to beg, but accepted it as they did not give anything to the Koranic master for the child’s keep and “it is the tradition of the *daara* to beg.” She did not worry about Alassane because “the Koranic master takes care of him” and he was learning the Koran. However, had there been a *daara* in the village, her son would have stayed at home with his family to learn the Koran.²⁰

* Name has been changed.

¹⁹ Interview with a mother of a *talibé* as part of the research for *Begging for Change*, *supra* note 5.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

3. International and regional legal framework

International and regional laws, like national laws, do not themselves prevent or stop abuses. However, they are essential to setting standards for national law and practice.

Children in forced begging situations are protected under various international and regional treaties, all of which the Government of Senegal has ratified (see Appendix). The challenge is to ensure that the Government lives up to its international obligations by making these provisions a reality.

International framework

Slavery, servitude and practices similar to slavery

The UN Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery (1956) defines child servitude as:

“Any institution or practice whereby a child or young person under the age of 18 years, is delivered by either or both of his natural parents or by his guardian to another person, whether for reward or not, with a view to the exploitation of the child or young person or of his labour” (Article 1(d) and 7(b)).

This covers children exploited within institutions, such as Koranic schools in West Africa, and has explicitly been referred to as such, for example by the ILO.²¹

Forced labour

Forced labour is closely associated with slavery, having very similar characteristics. It is defined in the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) Convention No. 29 concerning Forced or Compulsory Labour (1930) as:

“...all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily.” (Article 2 (1)).

The labour in question does not have to be officially recognised as ‘economic activity’ for it to fall under the definition of “forced labour”. The ILO expressly recognises child or adult begging under coercion as forced labour.²² The term “under the menace of



Photo: Emilia Regnier

²¹ The ILO has described the system of children living with Koranic teachers in Niger as akin to ownership: “Children are in a relationship resembling that of a slave to master, lacking freedom to control their own lives, as a result of which they perform work for which they have not offered themselves voluntarily.” See Reports of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, International Labour Conference, Report III (Part 1A) General Report and observations concerning particular countries, Geneva, (2004), page 154; (2003), page 155; and (2002), page 156.

²² International Labour Office, *A Global Alliance Against Forced Labour: Global report under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*, ILO, Geneva, page 6.



Photo: Emilie Régner

any penalty” has been widely interpreted to include violence, denunciation to the police or authorities, economic threats, or the loss of rights or privileges.²³

Individuals may also start work voluntarily, but be forced into work if such ‘menaces of penalty’ are subsequently inflicted upon them.

Child labour and exploitation

ILO Convention No.182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999) defines which child labour practices must be addressed by States as a priority. All forced child begging clearly fits within its parameters. This is irrespective of whether child begging is considered to be slavery, forced labour, the end-result of trafficking, or simply an illicit activity or a “hazardous” form of work.

The Convention considers “the worst forms of child labour” to include:

“[a]ll forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour” (Article 3(a));

“the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities” (Article 3(c)); and

work, which is likely to *“harm the health, safety or morals”* of the child (Article 3(d)).

All forms of child begging violate children’s rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Rights that are particularly affected by begging include the right to be free from economic exploitation or performing work which is hazardous, affects a child’s education, or harms their

²³ *Ibid*, pages 5- 6.



Photo: Emilie Régner

development (Article 32); and the right to protection from all other forms of exploitation (Article 36).

Child trafficking

Forced child begging may involve the trafficking of children. Under the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (2000), children (under 18 years old) who are moved from one location to another for the purposes of exploitation are considered to be trafficked whether or not they “agreed” to the exploitation (Article 3(a)-(c)).

Regional framework

The African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (1981) includes an article on the protection of children’s rights (Article 18(3)). The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) contains a number of provisions relevant to forced child begging. It prohibits all forms of child exploitation, and, like the UN Convention

on the Rights of the Child and ILO Convention No.182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, obliges States to protect children from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or interfere with the child’s development. Furthermore, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child specifically prohibits “*the use of children in all forms of begging*” (Article 29). Importantly, this article encourages penalising those who exploit children for begging, and not child beggars themselves.

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child contains some provisions which could relate specifically to children begging for Koranic teachers. It calls on States to:

“... take all appropriate measures to eliminate harmful social and cultural practices affecting the welfare, dignity, normal growth and development of the child and in particular: (a) those customs and practices prejudicial to the health and life of the child.” (Article 21(1)).



Photo: Emilie Régner

4. The Government response to date

Legal framework

The Government of Senegal has introduced legislation, which could go a long way towards tackling the issue of forced child begging:

Law No. 2005-6 to Combat Trafficking in Persons and Related Practices and to Protect Victims (2005):

This Law explicitly criminalises forced child begging and does not distinguish between ‘tolerable’ and ‘prohibited’ begging as the Criminal Code does (see below):

“Whosoever organises the begging of another in order to benefit, or hires, leads, or deceives a person in order to engage him in begging or to exercise pressure on him to beg ... will be punished by imprisonment of two to five years and a fine of 2,000,000 CFA (US\$ 1,046 - US\$ 4,185).”

It also makes trafficking punishable by imprisonment of between five to ten years and a fine of five to twenty million CFA (US\$ 10,460 – US\$ 41,850). The maximum penalty is to be pronounced if the crime is committed *inter alia*, against a minor.²⁴

The Criminal Code:

Section II governs physical violence, *murder and other crimes*: *“Whosoever wilfully injures or beats a child under 15 years of age ... or who wilfully deprives a child of food or care as to endanger his health, or who commits against a child any violence or assault, except minor assaults, will be punished by imprisonment of one to five years and a fine of 25,000 to 200,000 CFA (US\$ 52 - US\$ 418).”* Imprisonment of

up to ten years can be ordered if the abuser is a parent or any other person having authority over the child or acting as the child’s guardian (Article 298).

Section V, Paragraph III criminalises begging; every act of begging is punishable by imprisonment of three to six months. This penalty also applies to any person who allows a minor below 21 years of age under their authority to beg.²⁵ However, the Code’s text states that begging is tolerated at sites and in conditions which are consecrated by religious traditions (Article 245).

Law No. 2005-6 to Combat Trafficking in Persons and Related Practices and to Protect Victims could reasonably be said to include begging in whichever location and for whatever purpose, and has been interpreted as such by the ILO, for example.²⁶ Nevertheless, amending the Criminal Code would remove any doubt that this legislation also applies to *daaras*. It would also bring the Code clearly into line with Senegal’s commitments, notably under ILO Convention No.182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour and No.29 on Forced Labour, as well as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Article 21).

Law enforcement

Only a few isolated cases of forced child begging have been prosecuted under the Criminal Code over the last few years, including those mentioned on page four above. However, there was no record of

²⁴ Articles 1 and 2, Section I, Chapter I.

²⁵ Article 245, Loi no. 75-77, Code pénal (Law No. 75-77 Criminal Code), 9 July 1975.

²⁶ Reports of the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (2009 to 2011) all call on the Government of Senegal to enforce the Law to Combat Trafficking in Persons and Related Practices and to Protect Victims (2005) without reference to any possible limitations on its application.

any marabout/Koranic master being arrested, prosecuted or convicted, expressly for forcing *talibés* to beg²⁷ until the public outcry following the launch of the Human Rights Watch report on the issue in April 2010. This set in motion the following events:

- August 2010 - Prime Minister Souleymane Ndéné Ndiaye announced a decree banning begging in public places.
- September 2010 - Seven Koranic masters were arrested and given six month sentences and a fine of 100,000 CFA (US\$209) as a “warning” under Law No. 2005-6. However, these sentences were not carried out.²⁸
- According to the US State Department, a further two Koranic Masters were sentenced during the same period and served one month prison terms before being released.²⁹

In September 2010, associations of Koranic teachers in religious centres condemned the application of the law, threatening to withdraw their support for President Abdoulaye Wade in forthcoming elections, scheduled to take place in February 2012.³⁰ By October 2010, President Wade had retracted the ban, reportedly on the grounds that it went against Senegal’s long

established custom of collecting alms to ban begging outright in one go.³¹

Government policy

Although there is currently no national regulatory framework or code of conduct for *daaras* in Senegal, the Government appears to support a harmonised State-run and/or regulated system of Koranic schooling and at the time of writing had taken some steps towards creating one:

The Government established a *Daara* Inspectorate (Inspektorat des Daara) in the Ministry of Education to lead the *daara* modernisation programme and the integration of modern *daaras* into the State system. This became effective in 2008. The *Daara* Inspectorate is still in the process of setting up its administration, which has a decentralised structure, as part of its plan to roll out the programme nationwide. They have elaborated a number of regulatory texts which are now before Parliament. In the meantime, it is expected that a temporary framework agreement governing *daaras* will be signed by associations representing Koranic masters with specific norms governing how their *daaras* are run, including the abolition of begging.

²⁷ The US Department of State’s Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons’ *Trafficking in Persons Report* (2007), claimed that two religious teachers had been convicted “under the anti-trafficking law for child trafficking” during the reporting period and each had been sentenced to two years’ imprisonment. This sentence is also commensurate with the forced child begging provisions of the 2005 Anti-Trafficking law (Article 3). However, many commentators, including Human Rights Watch (*supra* note 3, page 100), have claimed that the 2005 Anti-Trafficking Law had not been applied to Koranic masters’ treatment of *talibés* before 2010. In any case, the number of prosecutions for forced child begging does not correspond adequately to the scale of exploitation.

²⁸ See for example, US Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat the Trafficking in Persons, *Trafficking in Persons Report* (2011).

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ See for example, “Les Imams Ratib du Fouta Publient une ‘Fatwa’ contre L’Interdiction de la Mendicité: C’est un complot par des ONGs occidentaux contre les traditions islamiques”, *Le Populaire*, 4 September 2010, <http://www.popxibaar.com>; “Touba-Marabouts et maitres coraniques font bloc contre la loi 06-2005. Wade est averti pour 2012”, *Seneweb News*, 7 September 2010, <http://www.seneweb.com>.

³¹ See for example, “Sénégal: le Président Wade conteste l’interdiction de la mendicité dans les lieux publics” *RFI*, 9 October 2010, <http://www.rfi.fr>; “Interdiction de la mendicité : Wade se dédit et désavoue son gouvernement”, *Le Populaire*, 8 October 2010, <http://www.popxibaar.com>.



Photo: Emille Régner

A number of curricula for modern *daaras* have been developed in the non-State sector and are already in operation.³² However, in January 2010, the Ministry of Education signed an agreement with the Partenariat pour le Retrait et la Réinsertion des Enfants de la Rue (PARRER) to develop a harmonised curriculum for Koranic schools (funded by the PARRER). The PARRER formally launched their curriculum for State-run modern *daaras* in January 2011. Drawing from other curricula, the official PARRER document covers a wider range of competences, including national languages and vocational training, in line with existing law and policy.³³ In May 2011, the PARRER launched a document outlining Norms and Standards for Koranic Schools,³⁴ which they opened for consultation among a range of stakeholder groups, beginning with a meeting in July 2011.

On average there are six, and a maximum of eight, school inspectors in each (administrative) department of the country. In the early 2000s, the State began recruiting specialised Franco-Arab inspectors, who will be tasked with inspecting modern *daaras*. The aim is to have an average of two of these additional inspectors per department, depending on its size.

The Government's stated commitment to *daara* modernisation is encouraging. However, the overall response to the problem, particularly in terms of law enforcement, is inadequate when compared with the scale and gravity of the problem.

³² Notably, curricula developed and used by ENDA Jeunesse Action and USAid to support their existing work with *daaras*.

³³ For example, the Loi d'Orientation de l'Education Nationale 91-22 (11 February 1991), and the Programme Décennal de l'Education et de la Formation (PDEF).

³⁴ Abdoul Diallo, "Normes et standards de qualité pour l'école coranique," PARRER, Dakar, May 2011. Ibrahima and Amadou were interviewed during a visit to *Daara* Serigne Gaye, 30 September 2011.



Photo: Aliou Mbaye

Case study: modern *daara*

Daara Serigne Gaye is typical of the relatively few so-called “modern *daaras*” which already exist in Senegal today. It is located in Dakar, and like many modern *daaras* established prior to the Government’s *daara* modernisation programme, it is financed primarily by charitable contributions and fees paid by parents. It was established in 2001 and offers both boys and girls schooling in the Koran, Arabic and French. There are currently 64 children at the *daara*, aged between six and 13 years old. About half of them board at the school with the remaining children returning home to their families every evening. The children who board see their families about once a fortnight. The school provides three meals a day for the children. None of the children are sent out to beg.

Souleymane* is a boy of eight years old and has been in the *daara* for three years. He is happy there. His favourite lesson is studying the Koran. Above all, he likes the atmosphere, which is like “a family.” He enjoys a good relationship with the teachers: “they are understanding, polite, they help us to understand the lessons.” Demba* is 13 years old and returns home every day after school. His favourite thing about the *daara* is all the friends he has made there. He likes the teachers too, “because they respect us.” Both boys want to be policemen when they grow up.³⁵

* Name has been changed.

³⁵ Souleymane and Demba were interviewed during a visit to *Daara* Serigne Gaye, 30 September 2011.

5. Conclusions and recommendations



Photo: Emille Régner

Despite being clearly visible and their plight well known thanks to a multitude of reports and campaigns on the subject over the years, tens of thousands of *talibés* are still suffering abuse in Senegal. They continue to be forced to beg for long hours. They experience physical abuse and other forms of threats and coercion, receive little or no pay, and are separated from their families for long periods, living in crowded and unhygienic living conditions.

Poverty lies at the heart of forced child begging, alongside causes such as lack of access to State education and parents' wishes for their children to learn the Koran. However, the only options for a Koranic education currently usually fall outside the formal and regulated education sector.

While religious culture is sometimes used to justify forced begging, sending *talibés* out to beg seems to be more a reflection of prevailing economic conditions than an inevitable or intrinsic part of Koranic teaching in Senegal.

Forced child begging is one of the worst forms of child labour and, as such, requires urgent action by the Government. The Government has taken some steps to address the problem, particularly by enacting laws and initiating a State-run and and/or regulated modern *daara* programme. However, progress on this needs to be advanced urgently, and the Government is still failing to take steps to enforce laws protecting *talibés*.

This situation cannot be allowed to persist. The Government of Senegal is therefore called upon as a matter of priority to:

1. Amend current legislation relating to forced child begging

National legislation exists in Senegal to protect children from forced child begging and other abuses. However, it would be helpful to amend the Criminal Code to remove any doubt that forcing a child to beg is prohibited in all locations and all circumstances, thereby bringing it clearly into line with Senegal's commitments under ILO Conventions No.182 and No.29, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

2. Strictly enforce existing laws relating to forced child begging

Existing legislation is not adequately enforced, particularly the 2005 Law to Combat Trafficking in Persons and Related Practices and to Protect Victims. The law must be used to punish those Koranic masters who exploit children in this way with sentences that are commensurate with the crime, and are strictly enforced, so as to act as a real deterrent.



Photo: Aliou Mbaye

3. Accelerate existing efforts to modernise the 'daara system,' including by introducing minimum standards of care, developing a national curriculum and bringing daaras under State regulation.

The Government has begun to tackle the problem of forced child begging at its root through its *daara* modernisation programme. However, this process must be advanced without delay, consulting as widely as possible among civil society organisations and religious representatives, *inter alia* to: allocate resources from the State budget and identify any additional funding sources required to implement the programme nation-wide, especially in rural areas from where most *talibés* in Senegal originate; establish a training programme for those Koranic masters willing to participate; pilot and roll out the national curriculum; finalise the establishment and implementation of a nation-wide regulatory system, including the hiring of additional schools' inspectors as required.



Photo: Aliou Mbaye

4. Address the demand for *talibé* begging among the wider population.

The general population must be educated fully on the harmful effects of forced child begging and, above all, on the fact that well-intentioned donations to individual *talibés* could in fact help to perpetuate the very problem they wish to alleviate. The Government should organise alternative ways for concerned members of the public to support *talibés*. For example, it should put into practice the initiative announced by Prime Minister Souleymane Ddéné Ndiaye in October 2010 to set up central points for the collection of alms and in consultation with leading religious figures and NGOs decide how to distribute the sums received for the true benefit of *talibés*.

5. Provide training for police and other officials on relevant laws and child protection.

Police and other officials who come into contact with all child beggars, including *talibés*, need training in national law relating to forced child begging and child protection issues.

6. Rescue, rehabilitate and reintegrate *talibés* in their communities of origin.

Talibés who are being forced to beg or face other abuses must be removed from harm and offered rehabilitative care appropriate to their needs. Strenuous efforts must be made to locate their families and return them to and reintegrate them into their communities of origin.

7. Prevent forced child begging by tackling root causes, including poverty.

In addition to establishing a State run and/or regulated modern *daara* programme, a range of coordinated strategies must be set in motion to tackle the root causes of forced child begging, particularly poverty alleviation. Measures, such as micro-credits, must be taken to improve life in communities of origin and assist poorer families to look after their children at home. The Government should target State support to communities known to be vulnerable to this problem, such as drought prone areas in rural Senegal. At the same time, the Government should intensify other prevention activities among families, such as awareness-raising about the immediate and long-term risks to children forced to beg.

8. Work closely with Governments and key stakeholders in neighbouring countries of origin

Many *talibés* are sent to *daaras* in Senegal's urban centres from other West African countries, notably Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Mali and The Gambia. The Government of Senegal must further develop its bi-lateral and multi-lateral relations with these countries to prevent trafficking for forced child begging from abroad.

Appendix: Background to Senegal



Development indicators

Total population: 12,860,717

GNI per capita: US\$1,050

Access to an improved water source: 52% of the rural population.

Life expectancy at birth: 56 years.

Infant mortality: 93 under five-year-olds per 1,000 live births.

Primary school completion rate: 49% of the relevant age group.³⁶

International Standard	Ratified
UN Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery, 1956	1979
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989	1990
UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. Supplementing the Convention on Transnational Organized Crime, 2000	2003
ILO Convention 29 on Forced or Compulsory Labour, 1930	1960
ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999	2000
The African Charter on Human and People's Rights, 1981	1982
The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 1990	1998

³⁶ Latest available statistics have been gathered, mainly from the World Bank Development Indicators database (2009-10), see: <http://data.worldbank.org/country/senegal>.



The NGO Platform is a group of concerned NGOs, mostly based in Senegal, who share an active concern for the *talibé* issue. They first joined together in April 2010 and have since formed a formal Coalition with 47 members to date (September 2011):

Action Enfance Sénégal, Action Humanitaire pour la Solidarité et l'Entraide et des Populations (AHSEP), Action pour le Développement l'Education et la Réinsertion (ADERE), Aide et Action Sénégal, Amnesty Sénégal, And Défar Cees, Association des Comédiens du Sénégal (ARCOS), Association des Femmes Juristes (AFJ), Association des Jeunes Leaders (AJL), Association des journalistes contre les Violences Faites aux Enfants, Association Kememeroise d'Aide pour la Protection de l'Enfance (ASKEPE), Association Mbouroise d'Assistance à la Femme et à l'Enfant (AMAFE), Association Siggil Talibé, Cadre d'Action de la Société Civile (CASC), Cadre d'Appui à l'Initiative Nationale en faveur des Talibés (CAINT), Centre d'Information et de Sensibilisation sur les Drogues (CISD), Coalition Education pour Tous, Coalition Nationale des Association en Faveur des Enfants (CONAFE), Cœur Unis, Collectif pour la Synergie et la Défense des Ecoles publiques (COSYDEP), Collectif Educatif Alternatif (CEA), Collectif pour la modernisation des Daara (COMOD), Comité Intersyndical de Lutte contre les Pires Formes de Travail des Enfants (CILPFTE), Dem Galam, Enda Graf Sahel, Enda Jeunesse Action, Espace de Concertation et d'Orientation de Pikine Nord (ECO/PN), Fissabilillah, Gra RADEP, Human Rights Watch, Intermondes, Jeunesse Culture Loisir et Technologies (JCLTIS), Maison de la Gare, Mouvement des Entreprises du Sénégal (MEDS), Parlement des Enfants, Réseau des Acteurs à l'Initiative Locale (RAIL), Réseau des Journalistes pour la Protection des Droits de l'Enfant, Réseau des Journalistes pour la Protection des Enfants, Réseau des Organisation de Lutte contre l'Emigration (ROLE), Réseau Population Développement, Réseau pour la Protection des Enfants (RESPE), Save the Children Sweden, Sentinelles, Suer pour Servir, Tostan, Vivre Ensemble Madesahel, World Vision Sénégal

Any civil society organisation which tackles forced child begging may become a member of the Platform. International Organisations and Government bodies can be observers. To join the Platform as a member, it is necessary to apply to the steering committee via the secretariat, and to commit to respecting the Platform's mission, objectives and strategies. For more information, contact:

Le CAINT, Liberté 6 Extension, Villa No 112, Dakar, Sénégal, téléphone : ++ 221 33 827 47 92
e-mail: caintgroups@gmail.com / plateformedroitshumains@yahoo.fr.

Anti-Slavery International, founded in 1839, is committed to eliminating all forms of slavery throughout the world. Slavery, servitude and forced labour are violations of



individual freedoms, which deny millions of people their basic dignity and fundamental human rights. Anti-Slavery International works to end these abuses by exposing current cases of slavery, campaigning for its eradication, supporting the initiatives of local

organisations to this end, and pressing for more effective implementation of international laws against slavery. For further information see: **www.antislavery.org.**

Registered charity: 1049160

Time for Change: A call for urgent action to end the forced child begging of talibés in Senegal
Anti-Slavery International, 2011