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June 12, 2021

Andreas Zagklis,
Secretary General
International Basketball Federation (FIBA)

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HRW.org

Re: Concerns regarding Mali's Under-18 girls' national basketball team

Dear Mr. Zagklis,

We write on behalf of Human Rights Watch, an international non-governmental organization that conducts research and advocacy on human rights abuses by states and non-state actors around the world.

As part of our global research on child abuse in sport, Human Rights Watch has documented a pattern of sexual harassment and abuse by Mr. Amadou Bamba, the current head coach of Mali's Under-18 girls' national basketball team (which is overseen by the Mali Basketball Federation, a member of FIBA).

This letter is meant to inform you of the reports against Bamba, inquire about FIBA's prior knowledge of Bamba's abuse, request FIBA's response to our findings, and urge FIBA to take immediate steps to protect Malian girls in basketball from abuse. We do so in accordance with the policy contained within FIBA's ["Five Pillars of Safeguarding Rights of Children and Adults at Risk,"](#) which iterates "zero tolerance" for sexual harassment and abuse of players, including the abuse of children by their coaches.

In March, April, May, and June of 2020, Human Rights Watch interviewed several current and former players on the Under-18 girls' national basketball team, their family members, and others involved in girls' basketball in Mali. These individuals reported to Human Rights Watch that Bamba raped, sexually assaulted, and sexually harassed numerous players on the Under-18 team, at least as recently as 2020 and dating back to 2016, his first year as the team's head coach.

Bamba also reportedly retaliated against players who refused to have sex with him, including threatening to have them imprisoned, taken off the team, and/or lose their playing time.

These reports of abuse include:

- In 2020, Bamba sexually assaulted a 17-year-old player on the team in her hotel room during a team trip. Bamba entered the player's hotel room in the middle of the night and "made her touch certain parts on his body" and "put his hands underneath her underwear." When she refused to have sex with Bamba, he significantly reduced her playing time on the team.
- In 2019, Bamba tried to force a 17-year-old player on the team to have sex with him, offering playing time and money in exchange for sex. She said that

Bamba also regularly groped players on the team: “He kept trying to touch the younger players’ breasts and other intimate parts.” When she refused to have sex with Bamba, he took her off the team.

- In 2016, according to a player on the team at the time, Bamba “was touching girls all the time, touching their breasts. He was dating girls on the team...I believe he was having sex with some of the players.” When the player refused Bamba’s attempts to have sex with her, she was held out of games.

According to child protection experts within Mali’s basketball and sporting community, Bamba’s history of sexual abuse is widely known, suggesting a long pattern of abusive behavior. Aïssata Tina Djibo, a former player on the Under-18 girls’ national basketball team and a current professional player in France, said she was very worried as soon as Bamba became coach of the Under-18 team in 2016 because she had been told by others how he had previously used his power as coach to seek sex with young players: “I told myself, these girls are [in trouble]...He’s going to really do bad things.” The former players with whom Human Rights Watch spoke mentioned older players warning them about Bamba’s abusive behavior.

The Mali Basketball Federation has oversight over the Under-18 girls’ national basketball team, including the selection of the coach. Players and athlete family members told Human Rights Watch that they had alerted the Mali Basketball Federation in 2020 and 2021 to Bamba’s abuse, but that the Federation had taken no action to address the reported abuses.

To the contrary, one victim told Human Rights Watch that she spoke to the Federation in 2020 to tell them about Bamba’s attempt to have sex with her. The player said that the Federation would secure her a spot on the team if she did not officially report Bamba: “[They] said if I don’t disobey Bamba, then I can be on the team.”

“I told the federation staff about the abuses—and no one took any action to help the girls,” one former male national team player reported to Human Rights Watch. This information indicates that the Mali Basketball Federation was in violation of FIBA’s child abuse protection policies, which requires that allegations of abuse be reported to local law enforcement and to FIBA for investigation.

The [2021 FIBA Under-19 Women’s Basketball World Cup](#) takes place in Hungary from August 7 to 15, where Mali is one of 16 teams competing. The national team is currently under selection, and female basketball players are concerned about their safety in training before and at the tournament.

In light of these reports, we would like to request FIBA’s response to the following questions:

1. Does FIBA have any knowledge of the reports of sexual abuse by Mr. Bamba?
2. If yes, is FIBA aware of any investigations into Mr. Bamba’s reported abuses?
3. What actions, if any, does FIBA plan to take in response to Mr. Bamba’s reported abuses and on what timeline?

Given the reported danger Bamba poses to the girls he coaches, and the failure of the Mali Basketball Federation to take action, Human Rights Watch urges FIBA to intervene and take the following steps:

- Suspend Bamba from all coaching and teaching, including from coaching the Under-18 girls’ national basketball team, pending a full investigation into the allegations;

- Suspend Harouna Maiga, the President of the Mali Basketball Federation, in accordance with FIBA’s child protection policies, pending a full investigation;
- Sanction the Mali Basketball Federation for violating FIBA’s child protection policies by failing to report Mr. Bamba’s abuses to law enforcement and FIBA;
- Ensure protection from retaliation for complainants or those who may be speculated to have been complainants;
- Work with Mali civil society groups and health experts to ensure abuse survivors have access to quality support services, including to pay for trauma counseling; and
- Require the Mali Basketball Federation to establish a reporting mechanism for child athlete abuse, and an investigation system for these reports.

It is crucial that an investigation be conducted, and that the investigation be survivor-centered, safe, and transparent.

By acting on these recommendations, FIBA has the opportunity to enforce its “zero tolerance” policy of child abuse in sport; protect child basketball players from further abuse; to hold abusive coaches accountable; and to signal to the world that FIBA is committed to making basketball safe for all children who participate.

FIBA can and should take steps already demonstrated by other global federations such as FIFA where coaches, referees, and officials of the Haiti Football Federation—including the president of the federation and senior staff—[were suspended for sexual abuse of women and girl football players](#), or for knowing about the abuse and failing to uphold their duty of care to athletes.

Any response to the above questions by July 1, 2021, as well as other information that you can provide on measures taken by FIBA, will be reflected in our upcoming reporting. We can be contacted by email at [REDACTED].

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Minky Worden
Director of Global Initiatives
Human Rights Watch



Corinne Dufka
West Africa Director
Human Rights Watch