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H.E. President Macky Sall
Presidence de la Republique du Senegal
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Open Letter

Your Excellency,

Please accept my regards on behalf of Human Rights Watch.

Human Rights Watch is an independent, international human rights organization that conducts research into human rights situations in more than 90 countries globally.

We have conducted human rights research on children and access to education in Senegal since 2005, including on the situation of Talibé children, many of whom have been exploited and abused in the course of their Quranic education. Our most recent report, released in July 2017, welcomed the important move taken by the Senegalese government to address abuses against street children, including Talibés, and made recommendations on how this key effort can be strengthened.

Most recently, we conducted research on barriers affecting girls' secondary education in the southern regions of Kolda, Sédhiou, and Ziguinchor, as well as Dakar.

We are writing to you on the occasion of the Global Partnership for Education's replenishment conference, which you are hosting jointly with President Emmanuel Macron of France on February 1-2, 2018.

In view of your commitment to advancing education in Senegal and globally, we would like to take this key opportunity to urge you to pledge to ensure secondary education is fully free for all students in Senegal.

Human Rights Watch welcomes the government of Senegal's focus on expanding provision of primary and secondary education to more young people, including by allocating over 20 percent of the national budget to education. We also appreciate your personal role as a global education champion, and your efforts to encourage other governments, in Africa and elsewhere, to adequately fund education. We also recognize the

government's ongoing efforts to end female genital mutilation, and to curb child marriage rates.

Although Senegal's 2004 law on education states that compulsory education shall be free from 6 to 16 years of age, Human Rights Watch findings show that secondary education is not free in practice.

In 2017, we spoke to over 150 adolescent girls who are in and out of school, and conducted interviews with parents, teachers, village leaders, government officials, and local and national experts. We found that children attending government lower-secondary schools (*école moyen* or *collège*), pay at least 6,000 Central African Francs (CFA) in tuition fees, up to 10,000 CFA in furniture costs, 10,000 CFA for school materials, and up to 10,000 CFA in extra tuition for afternoon classes. Students attending government higher secondary school (*lycée*) pay 10,000 CFA in tuition fees. These costs exclude transportation, uniforms, and other costs particular to every school.

During our field research, Human Rights Watch met many adolescent girls whose families, on account of these fees, were not able to pay for their education. In many cases, girls told Human Rights Watch that their education was interrupted when parents or extended family members were simply no longer able to afford their education. Some girls dropped out of school. Our findings show that school fees contribute to low rates of retention and completion of compulsory lower secondary education, particularly in rural areas.

In some communities, girls felt that their parents prioritized boys' education and correspondingly were less willing to pay for their education. The lack of financial means to send girls to school impacts on their futures. In southern Senegal, an abrupt end to education exposes many girls to child marriage and teenage pregnancy.

In some rural areas where girls' participation in school is already low, principals and teachers said they personally pay for their students' fees to ensure students stay in school. We believe that this demonstrates teachers' commitment to support students, but also shows the significant burden school fees place on a community.

At times, the burden to find funds to pay for education falls on the girls themselves. Our research shows that some girls spend time working as domestic workers in bigger cities, in some cases under exploitative and abusive conditions, including sexual abuse. Although some return to their villages or towns to resume their studies, others end their education abruptly and continue working.

Human Rights Watch also found that girls are at risk of becoming victims of sexual exploitation by teachers, motorcycle drivers, and other adults who offer them money for fees, food, and basic items in exchange for sex. In some cases, to cut down the distance to school, girls from remote villages may be hosted by families in larger towns, with an expectation that they will be in charge of housework. Many of the girls told Human Rights Watch they had little time to combine studying with these duties.

We strongly believe that fully guaranteeing free primary and secondary education will ensure more young people, particularly girls, complete compulsory and secondary education in Senegal. Worldwide research has consistently shown that access to quality secondary education is critical in ensuring the enjoyment of children's fundamental rights and preventing other abuses against children, including child marriage. Numerous studies show that girls who continue their education, especially until completing secondary school, are more likely to invest in their own children's education, enabling them to become economically independent and positive contributors to society.

Across the African continent, countries like Ghana and Tanzania recently joined the group of African countries that guarantee free primary and secondary education, taking forward their national and international human rights obligations. Both countries have significantly increased enrollment in secondary education following the removal of school fees. We believe this is a crucial reform in order to ensure that all young people, regardless of their location or circumstances, have an equal right to primary and secondary education.

For all these reasons, we respectfully urge you to pledge to adopt a policy to make secondary education fully free in 2018, remove school fees and indirect costs in secondary education, and increase financial support to schools, in order to ensure all children in Senegal benefit from their right to quality education.

We look forward to continuing an open dialogue with the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Women, Family and Gender. We look forward to sharing our findings when we publish a full report during 2018.

Sincerely,

Zama Neff
Executive director, Children's rights

Cc. H.E. Minister Serigne Mbaye Thiam, Minister of National Education

H.E. Minister Ndèye Saly Diop Dieng, Minister of Women, Family and Gender