



Ref: EFSCRJ/PR/014/2025

PUBLIC STATEMENT

28th May 2025

**EFSCRJ Calls on Urgent Action and Accountability for the Scabies Outbreak at Daara
Madina Suwaneh**

We have noted with deep concern an announcement by the Ministry of Health on May 27 about a scabies outbreak at the Daara Madina Suwaneh, a Quranic school located in Brufut Heights. The Ministry said they examined 101 minors, and 57 cases of scabies were confirmed. We are alarmed that such a disease could break out in such a facility for children. On their Facebook page, the Ministry of Health said,

“These children are facing serious health risks, worsened by a lack of adequate medical care at the time of the investigations. The Ministry is working hard to provide immediate treatment, improve hygiene conditions, and prevent further spread of the disease.”

We consider this outbreak as symptomatic of the perennial dereliction of duty by public institutions which have been mandated under Section 17 of the Constitution to respect and protect the rights of all persons in the Gambia. We, therefore, first and foremost hold the ministries responsible for Health, Children and Justice, as well as the Gambia Police Force and the National Human Rights Commission squarely responsible, individually, and collectively for the deplorable health situation in this *Daraa*.

The children of this school have a right to the highest attainable standard of living, including hygiene, sanitation, healthcare, and safety as set out in various policies and laws of the Gambia. Responsible state institutions have a duty to register, monitor, train, guide and hold accountable service providers to ensure that they provide quality facilities and services to beneficiaries in fulfilment of their human rights. Hence the outbreak of scabies in this facility affecting such a large number of children over a considerable period undetected meant the necessary monitoring and accountability by public institutions were absent.

We recall in October 2021, a fire outbreak at the Bilal Islamic boarding school led to the death of nine children and injuring many more. In another case, in July 2022, investigative journalists at *Malagen* exposed poor living conditions and abuse of children at the Penny Appeal care homes. In all these cases, relevant authorities issued statements, made visits, and promised accountability, yet until today, no tangible action has been taken against perpetrators. Similarly, in 2022, at least 70 children died from acute kidney injury after consuming contaminated syrup. All of these cases highlight the vulnerability children face in this country due to state failure.

While the Child Protection Alliance demanded the closure of Bilal boarding school and demanding thorough investigation of the incident, the Minister of Gender, Children and Social Welfare only visited the crime scene to pay condolences without demanding accountability. On its part, the National Human Rights Commission released a statement that they were investigating the cause of the fire and would ensure full accountability. UNICEF added its voice by also calling on the authorities to carry out a thorough investigation, ensure accountability and put in place strong mechanisms to safeguard the security and safety of children in schools, especially those in boarding schools.





It is now more than four years now yet Bilal boarding school was never closed nor was there any accountability since then. The Gambia Police Force neither arrested nor prosecuted anyone for this fatal incident in which the right to live was destroyed with impunity. It is the same with the Penny Appeal case which, even though it went to court, justice was not delivered. Similarly, the Government has failed to fully implement the recommendations of both the presidential and parliamentary inquiries on the AKI case.

It is in light of the above that EFSCRJ hereby holds the State and its various ministries, departments, and agencies responsible for the disease outbreak at Daara Madina Suwaneh. In this regard, we hereby present the following recommendations:

1. The ministries of Health and Children in collaboration with the Gambia Police Force and the NHRC to launch joint and separate investigations on the circumstances of the scabies outbreak in this school as well as an assessment of the general living, health, security, and other conditions that impact human rights,
2. The above institutions to determine those responsible for the school and subject them to further investigation and prosecution for negligence leading to the scabies outbreak,
3. The Ministry of Health together with the Ministry responsible for children to immediately close the school and subject it to thorough disinfection as well as review of their standards, structures, systems, and all aspects of the facility to determine their appropriateness for human habitation, especially for children,
4. The relevant ministries, departments, and agencies to carry out comprehensive nationwide monitoring visits to all boarding schools and facilities of any kind for children to determine their current state of affairs for appropriate action,
5. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social to implement its Minimum Standards of Quality Care for Child-Care Centers and Private Residential Care Homes for Children in The Gambia and ensure compliance by all service providers.
6. The Ministry of Health, the Gender and Child Welfare Unit of the Gambia Police Force, NHRC, and the Directorate of Children Affairs to ensure continuous, effective and comprehensive monitoring of boarding schools and similar facilities to ensure that human rights are always protected and fulfilled.

Section 199 of the Children's Act mandates the Directorate of Children's Affairs to inspect childcare facilities at least once every six months with the power to suspend operations of such facilities where they fall short of meeting the minimum standards. If this was done, these deaths and diseases in boarding schools and childcare homes would have been avoided.

EFSCRJ wishes to reiterate strongly that public institutions are created for a purpose, and they must be seen to fulfill their purpose with diligence, effectiveness, and efficiency. The purpose of public institutions is to respect, promote, protect, and fulfill the rights of citizens. Hence no space or activity is beyond the reach or scope of these institutions to ensure that human rights remain inviolable, enjoyable and protected throughout the country.

EFSCRJ will continue to monitor this matter to ensure transparency and accountability.

2025 – The Year of Transparency and Accountability