

Paris Suburb Burns in Protests after Police Rape



Paris, February 7 (RHC)-- Clashes have erupted between protesters and police in a suburban Paris neighborhood as hundreds rallied to protest police brutality after a Black youth was allegedly sodomized with a baton following his arrest.

The clashes occurred early Tuesday after crowds of protesters took to the streets of impoverished Aulnay-sous-Bois neighborhood in the Seine-Saint-Denis suburb to condemn the act. France's interior ministry has confirmed charges of torture and rape against four police officers involved in the case.

The development came after the 22-year-old victim, identified only as Theo, was transferred to a hospital with severe anal injuries and head trauma following his arrest by police officers. The incident risks reviving the controversial issue of policing in France's poor neighborhoods, which led to the death of another black man last year while in police custody and massive riots a decade ago.

According to the report, one officer was charged with rape and three others with assault during Theo's arrest in what has been described as a 'tough' neighborhood. The report said the severity of his injuries led a physician to declare him unfit to work for 60 days.

Theo recounted his ordeal at the hands of the police officer in a televised interview, saying he had also been racially abused in a patrol car following the physical abuse during the arrest.

Video footage of the arrest filmed by the police has been released. French Interior Minister Bruno Le Roux confirmed that all four police officers involved in Theo's arrest had been suspended. Police, however, have denied allegations of brutality and rape and claim they were targeting lookouts for drug dealers.

With tensions running high, the rallies and clashes late Monday night and early Tuesday marked the consecutive evening of protests in reaction to the latest case of police brutality in France.

On Saturday and Sunday evening, clashes and arson attacks were also reported in the huge housing complex – known as "3,000" – near the site of the arrest. Protesters set three vehicles on fire and several arrests were made.

Meanwhile, a group calling itself Black Lives Matter France -- an apparent offshoot of the US movement against police brutality -- seized on the case and engaged in organizing protest rallies.

The latest incident came amid a presidential election campaign and following the death of 24-year-old Adama Traore in police custody in another Parisian suburb last year.

It led to several nights of clashes in Beaumont-sur-Oise against the police, with cars and public property set on fire. Two autopsies were unable to determine the cause of Traore's death.

In 2005, the death of two French teenagers who were electrocuted while hiding from police in an electricity substation sparked weeks of riots. Nearly 10,000 vehicles were burned and 6,000 people were detained.

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