

French protesters defy government ban to rally against police brutality

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Paris, July 9 (RHC)-- Hundreds of people have taken to the streets in central Paris to protest persisting police brutality and racial profiling across France, despite a "shocking" ban on the gathering. Nearly two

thousand people defied a ban to join a memorial rally in central Paris on Saturday for Adama Traore, a young man of African descent killed while in police custody in 2016.

Seven years after his death, his sister had planned to lead an annual commemorative protest march north of Paris in Persan and Beaumont-sur-Oise. Police dispersed the crowd from Paris's huge Place de la Republique, sending several hundred people towards the wide Boulevard Magenta, where they were seen marching peacefully.

Meanwhile, protest rallies took place throughout the country to denounce police brutality and the killing of 17-year-old Nahel M. of Algerian origin during a traffic stop near Paris late last month. With tensions still running high following the unrest sparked by the police killing of Nahel M., a court ruled the chance of public disturbance was too high to allow the protest march to proceed.

The Paris police department also said in a statement published on its website that it had banned the planned protest rally, citing a "context of tensions." Authorities also banned a rally in the northern city of Lille on Saturday.

A health worker Felix Bouvarel who attended the Paris gathering described the ban as "shocking," saying that "freedom of assembly, in particular, is under threat," in France. Sandrine Rousseau, a lawmaker from the EELV Green party denounced the ban on the rally, saying, "Public liberties are losing ground little by little."

And Jean-Luc Melenchon, the outspoken head of the leftist France Unbowed party, criticized the administration of President Emmanuel Macron.

"From prohibition to repression... the leader is taking France to a regime we have already seen. Danger. Danger," he said in a tweet, referring to the World War II regime of Vichy leader Philippe Petain who collaborated with the Nazis.

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) called on France on Friday to pass legislation defining and banning racial profiling and challenged the country's "excessive use of force by law enforcement."

The French foreign ministry, however, rejected on Saturday that the country's legal system is racist, proclaiming in response that "any ethnic profiling by law enforcement is banned in France." "The struggle against excesses in racial profiling has intensified," the ministry further claimed, insisting that "any accusation of systemic racism or discrimination by law enforcement in France is unfounded."

The latest unrest across France has generated a major crisis for Macron, who had been hoping to press on with pledges he's made for his second term after seeing off months of violent protests that erupted in January over his decision to raise the retirement age.

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