

Riots spread after Adama Traoré's death in police custody near Paris

Our reporter
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Inhabitants of Beaumont-sur-Oise, near Paris, clashed with security forces on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday nights, amid rising anger over the death of Adama Traoré in police custody on Tuesday.

Traoré's family, which was denied access to his body until yesterday, is strongly contesting the security forces' account of events leading up to his death. He was arrested during an operation by paramilitary police (*gendarmes*) to arrest his brother, Bagui, as part of an investigation of several individuals on extortion charges—though Bagui was subsequently released without charge.

According to various conflicting versions of events given by the authorities to his family, Adama Traoré tried to interfere in his brother's arrest and was taken into custody, where he died of a heart attack or of an epileptic seizure.

Bagui Traoré, who was taken to the police station together with his brother, gave a totally different account. He said, "When the police arrived, Adama took off running because he didn't have his identity papers on him. They ran him down and caught up with him. Adama said, 'I surrender.' They surrounded him."

He added, "Then they took him to the police station in Persan. There, I found him surrounded by five or six policemen. He was on the floor, his hands handcuffed behind his back. He was not breathing anymore, he was lifeless. His face was covered in blood. I saw one policeman who had been on the team that arrested us. He had a white T-shirt and I saw him come back with a T-shirt drenched in blood, my brother's blood. My girlfriend was there, she saw it also. Adama did not have a heart attack, they beat him up."

Traoré's brother Youssef dismissed as not credible the police claim that his brother had died of heart trouble: "He was very fit. He played football; he lifted weights; he was very strong. He never had any heart problems. Yesterday he was bike riding when police arrested him.

With how hot it was, do you think he could have been doing that if he had had heart problems? Tuesday was his birthday. We were planning to all get together with the family to celebrate. Now he is gone."

Clashes erupted between police and inhabitants in several Paris suburbs, including Beaumont-sur-Oise, Persan and Bruyères-sur-Oise, where cars and shops were burned. Police authorities reported that nine people had been arrested on charges of "forming armed gangs, voluntary arson, and throwing incendiary objects at the security forces."

The *Gazette du Val d'Oise* cited Traoré's friends and family as they voiced their outrage with police, demanding that "justice be served."

"If the justice system cannot do its work," they added, "then we will do it. We cannot let this pass. The police are military men; if one of them dies at the front, they try to discover who is responsible and arrange to find that person. For us, it's the same."

His mother Oumou said, "I want to know the cause of his death. I want to see him so that I can grieve for him." She also appealed for youths in the area to avoid violence. "Violence brings nothing. I ask the youth to calm down and to pray for Adama. Attacking cars and shops does nothing. It will not bring Adama back to us."

Adama's twin sister Hawa said, "I want to know how he died. That is what I have been fighting for since I learned of his passing. ... The riots that happened since then, it is because we have gotten no answers. Everything we are told is vague."

Traoré's death and the clashes that have subsequently erupted between the population and paramilitary police, have occurred within an explosive political context. France remains under a state of emergency, and social tensions and anger are running high after the Socialist Party (PS) government violently repressed social protests against its regressive labor law, which is aimed at

destroying the decades-old basic social rights of French workers.

The suburbs of France's major cities have become social powder kegs, as tens of thousands of police, with extraordinary powers to search and detain individuals, are deployed on the streets. At the same time, popular anger against austerity and police state measures is rising across Europe.

Twice before, in 2005 and 2007, the suburbs of Paris and other French cities have exploded into mass rioting and street fighting against the police, after youths died in encounters with them. Today, the PS government is deeply discredited, and anger is mounting at the repeated deaths of innocent people while in police custody, not only in France, but across Europe and the United States. All the conditions exist for an even more explosive confrontation.

National ombudsman Jacques Toubon said he was "launching a solemn appeal for calm," adding: "Only one objective must dominate all the people involved, the search for truth."

Yesterday, however, police authorities released Adama Traoré's autopsy report, maintaining their account of events and directly attacking the family's account of his death.

"He had a very serious infection ... involving several organs," declared prosecutor Yves Jannier, who added, "clearly this person had not suffered any violence, unlike what some members of his family may have claimed."

The Traoré family's lawyer, Karim Achoui, told AFP that the infection "that Adama Traoré may have been suffering from does not explain the cause of his death." His family insisted it would seek the opinion of an "outside expert" before Adama was buried.

Initial reports last night indicated that protests and riots were again spreading in cities around Beaumont-sur-Oise, with clashes near a gas station in Beaumont and a car burning in l'Abbé-Breuil.



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