

Grenoble, France: Thousands march for teenagers killed in police chase

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Close to 2,000 friends, family, students and other workers joined a silent march on Wednesday afternoon in Grenoble, France, in honour of Adam, 17, and friend Fatih Karaku?, 19, and in support of their families. The two friends were killed in a scooter accident last weekend as they were being chased by police.

The families and friends of Adam and Fatih are demanding answers as to why they died. Last Saturday night at approximately 10.30pm, as the two teenagers were driving together, police officers decided to pursue them onto the city bypass in a chase, even though neither of them were wearing a helmet and though they were riding on a single unstable scooter.

Police claim the boys were hit by a bus while they were fleeing, after the bus driver, transporting a junior soccer team from training, saw the chase in his rear-view mirror and swerved right, hoping to avoid the scooter just as it was overtaking.

The latest demonstration of state indifference to the lives of workers and youth has triggered an eruption of pent-up social anger. On Saturday night, a group of 40 young people gathered at the riot police station in Grenoble. Riot police dispatched to the scene fired tear gas and rubber bullets at the youth. A number of cars were also set on fire outside the station. Clashes have taken place between police and youth on four nights this week.

Local buildings have been graffitied with the message: “The police killed Adam and Fatih,” and “Protect the children, the police kill them.”

Gathering at 5pm in the Mistral quarter on Wednesday, the procession marched silently toward the Carane bridge where the incident took place. At the head were Adam’s family, and close relations of Fatih, holding a banner that read: “Adam and Fatih, never again.” Fatih’s parents, who are Turkish, could not

attend because they were travelling to Turkey to organize the funeral process. Many students and friends of the boys carried white roses and wore t-shirts with the message: “Adam and Fatih, 02-03-2019.”

But the families have had to endure not only the pain of this loss. From the morning after the tragedy, they have been the subject of a vilification campaign in the corporate media and by the state, besmirching the character of the two boys and implicitly justifying their deaths.

Media accounts routinely assert that the boys either had a criminal record or were “known to police.” In a press conference Wednesday afternoon, Florent Girault, the lawyer representing both families in the investigation into the deaths, stated, “contrary to what has been stated by the police and what has been relayed by the media, the two youths had no judicial record. They were never judged nor condemned.”

This statement has been barely cited in the media, which continues to refer to the boys as delinquents. Widely reported have been allegations by police that the scooter was stolen and had no license plates.

Girault noted that the statement by the prosecutor to the media referred to a “scooter without lights.” He added: “It happens that the videos that are online and those to which the families have access for the moment make clear that the scooter which was chased had lights on the front, the rear, and a brake light.”

“It is very curious that this is completely in contradiction with the official statements,” he said. “It is all the more curious that, according to informal information received by the families, it appears that the person who published the video online was placed in jail yesterday.”

The family wanted to know “why the police chased a scooter with a minor and a young adult,” and “how

could they justify taking such a risk,” he said. “And did the police hit the scooter?”

Friends of both youth have made statements defending their names against the campaign of public vilification. Mediapart yesterday published the statements of Emirhan, a 16-year-old, prior to the march on Wednesday. “Adam was a good student,” he said. “It’s shocking to dirty his name when he has just died and it is still hard to believe he’s no longer here.” He added: “The journalists misrepresent everything and they take us for savages. But today, they’re going to be disappointed because we’re going to march in silence, without getting angry. They’re going to be bored.”

Another youth, Karim, published a video statement on Twitter. “Two days ago we lost two little brothers,” he said. “Two brothers who had a promising future. So, the police chased them to the point of killing them. Now an attempt is made to ascribe a role to them a role they did not play. They sully the honor of the families. From today, the truth must be re-established.”

“We are determined for justice to be done for Adam and Fatih,” he said. “The police do not have the right to choose between life and death, for no matter who it be—good, bad, French, Maghrebian, black, whatever you want.” He added: “We will fight until our last breath.”

Other workers who did not know either of the youth attended the march on Wednesday to show their solidarity with the families and oppose the slander against them.

Anissa, a 43-year-old bank worker, who attended the march with her nine-year-old son, told Mediapart: “From the morning after their death, it was already being said that they were delinquents, implying that they deserved it,” she said. “It’s an outrage. The journalists took word for word what the police told them, without even verifying it.”

“I came here to support the families. No matter what the children did or didn’t do. They didn’t have a helmet, and they were on a scooter that a priori was stolen. But is that a reason to follow them to the point of driving them into a dangerous bypass and putting their lives in danger to the end? Is there nothing better for the police to do than provoke the deaths of two young people? I wonder about the police that is supposed to protect our children. It worries me for my son.”

Karima, a 50-year-old worker, was quoted by the same publication: “For 20 years I’ve woken up at 4:00 a.m. to clean offices. I make 1,200 euros a month and I pay taxes. I’m a citizen like everyone else and I have the right to be respected and my children to be protected. But it’s always the same. In the suburbs, there is no justice.”

The death of Adam and Fatih has strong echoes of the events which triggered the 2005 riots, which lasted for three weeks in the suburbs of Paris and other major French cities. Police chased a group of youth, three of whom hid in a power station to avoid interrogation. Two of the boys died from electrocution. Their deaths provoked a rebellion driven by broader social anger over unemployment, poverty and police harassment.

President Jacques Chirac’s government responded with a violent crackdown, declaring France’s first state of emergency since the 1954-1962 Algerian war and arresting more than 2,500 people.



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