

Funeral held for French teenager as arrests mount on fifth night of protests

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Source: CNN

A tense atmosphere lingered in Nanterre on Saturday following the funeral of a [French teenager](#) who was fatally shot by police in the Paris suburb earlier this week.

Arrests continued to mount with more than 1,300 people detained Friday overnight into Saturday and another 121 people arrested Saturday during the fifth night of nationwide protests in France after the 17-year-old's death, according to the French Interior Ministry.

Family and friends gathered Saturday afternoon local time for the funeral service at a mosque in Nanterre. The funeral was solemn and quiet, according to CNN's team on the ground, with people waiting in silence for his coffin to leave the mosque and be taken for burial. The teenager has been buried in the Mont Valérien cemetery in Nanterre, CNN's team reported.

A heavy security presence was in place around the mosque.

The boy's mother, Mounia, told television station France 5 on Friday that [she blamed only the officer](#) who shot her son, Nahel Merzouk, for his death. Nonetheless, the killing has sparked widespread destructive unrest and questions over [whether race was a factor in his death](#).

Protests continued into the early hours of Saturday in defiance of a ban announced a day earlier on all "large-scale events" in the country, with rioting breaking out in several cities, CNN affiliate BFMTV reported.

France's Interior Ministry said Saturday that 1,311 people had been detained following the fourth night of violence, an update on its previous figure. It said 2,560 fires had been reported on public roads, with 1,350 cars burned, and that there had been 234 incidents of damage or fire in buildings.

France activated 45,000 police and gendarmes across the country Saturday night, according to the country's interior minister, Gérald Darmanin.

"I think everyone understands that the government won't back down," Darmanin said.

He added the French government will heavily reinforce security forces in Lyon and Marseille, where violent clashes took place Friday night.

Many of those detained since the unrest began on Tuesday are minors. The average age of the more than 2000 detainees is 17 years old, Darmanin said.

Seventy-nine police and gendarmes were injured over the course of Friday night and there were 58 attacks on police and gendarme stations, according to the Interior Ministry.

Two police officers suffered gunshot wounds in Vaulx-en-Velin, a suburb of Lyon, the office said, one to the nose and the other to the thigh.

Social media videos of scenes in Lyon, geolocated by CNN, showed rapid gunfire from an automatic rifle at night, fireworks being released at a protest and demonstrators next to burning fires.

The Interior Ministry said it would send its elite unit of riot police, CRS 8, to Lyon on Saturday night as it seeks to clamp down on the violence.

More than 700 businesses across France have been damaged since the start of the protests, French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said at a news conference Saturday. The businesses, which include shopping centers and bank branches, have been attacked, looted or in some cases, burned to the ground, he said.

Macron postpones state visit

In light of the protests, French President Emmanuel Macron has postponed his planned state visit to Germany, the press office of the German presidency said in a statement Saturday.

Macron spoke with German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier by phone to brief him on the “situation in his country,” the statement said. He had been due to visit Germany from July 2 to July 4.

On Friday, the German government expressed “concern” over the unrest sweeping France.

The French president has faced criticism after he was spotted at an Elton John concert on Wednesday while buildings were being defaced and cars burned across the country.

The continued violence overnight into Saturday came despite French police deploying 45,000 officers, special units, armored vehicles and helicopters across the country.

The country’s interior minister said in a tweet that reinforcements would be sent to Marseille on Saturday following reports by the local mayor of violence and looting.

Marseille mayor Benoit Payan had tweeted late Friday night that the scenes were “unacceptable” and called upon the state to “immediately send additional law enforcement forces.”

There was an explosion in the Old Port of Marseille on Friday evening, according to CNN affiliate BFMTV, but no casualties were reported. The broadcaster also shared video showing damage to the Alcazar library in Marseille which it said had been vandalized during the night.

The previous night, 917 people were detained across the country, among them children as young as 13, Darmanin told French TV channel TF1.

Based on numbers released by France’s Interior Ministry, CNN estimates that more than 2,000 protesters have been detained and around 522 police officers and gendarmes injured since the unrest first broke out on Tuesday.

Why are people protesting?

The unrest is a response to the death of Nahel, who was shot dead during a traffic stop Tuesday morning in Nanterre.

Footage of the incident filmed by a bystander showed two officers standing on the driver’s side of the car, one of whom fired his gun at the driver despite not appearing to be in any immediate danger.

The officer has said he fired his gun out of fear that the boy would run someone over with the car, according to Nanterre prosecutor Pascal Prache.

The officer currently faces a formal investigation for voluntary homicide and has been placed in preliminary detention.

Despite calls from top officials for patience to allow time for the justice system to run its course, a sizable number of people across France remain shocked and angry, especially young men and women of color who have been victims of discrimination by police. Nahel was of Algerian descent.

Protests appear even to have spread to overseas French territories.

A man was killed by a “stray bullet” during riots in Cayenne, the capital of French Guiana, on Thursday evening, according to a statement from the city’s mayor.

And authorities in Réunion, a French department in the Indian Ocean, said Saturday that at least 28 people had been detained in riots there, while five police officers and a gendarme were injured.

Darmanin has said that the death of Nahel “cannot justify the disorder and the delinquency,” while French Justice Minister Éric Dupond-Moretti has called for “firm sanctions” against the rioters and said that “justice was not achieved by looting, smashing public establishments and attacking people.”

This level of unrest and rioting has not been seen in France since 2005, when the deaths of two teenage boys who were hiding from police sparked weeks of rioting and prompted the government to call a state of emergency.

But the French government has so far resisted calling a state of emergency this time around.

A spokesperson for the Elysée said Friday that a state of emergency was “not necessary” and that a “gradual response” to the violence seen in recent days was “more appropriate.”

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