

## **Youth unemployment blamed for violent demonstrations in Morocco, Tunisia**

By Agence France Presse (AFP)

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RABAT: Unemployment disproportionately affecting young people is to blame for violent protests over the weekend in Morocco and Tunisia that killed one person and injured dozens, observers say. "Endemic unemployment among young people from the Maghreb [North Africa] is the cause of the protests that broke out in the past few days in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia," said Aziz, an activist from the Moroccan city of Sidi Ifni who asked not to be identified by his full name.

Clashes between security forces and young unemployed protesters erupted Saturday in the Moroccan port city 100 kilometers southwest of Rabat.

The national unemployment rate stood at 9.7 percent in 2007, according to government statistics, but four out of 10 of these jobseekers were younger than 25.

In Tunisia, the national unemployment rate reached 14 percent in 2007, according to a Tunisian government official.

"Youth unemployment, especially among thousands of graduates in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia is the common [factor] in the three countries where demonstrations periodically take place in cities," said Khalid Cherkaoui, president of the Moroccan Center for Human Rights (CMDH).

Sidi Ifni saw its first such protests in 2006, young people in the area told AFP.

The violence this weekend left 44 people injured, including 27 police officers, according to hospital sources in Sidi Ifni. CMDH estimates however that between one and five people died as a result of the clashes.

The government denies this. "There was not one death," said spokesman Khalid Naciri.

In the southwest Tunisian city of Redeyef, one person was killed in protests on Friday and several were injured.

Here the demonstrations were ignited by allegations that the region's main employer had doctored a recruitment campaign. Protesters believed that officials from the Gafsa Phosphate Company had manipulated a selection process to their own advantage.

In Sidi Ifni, where fishing is the primary source of income, police used force to unblock the port where 89 trucks waited with loads of some 800 tons of fish.

The blockade had begun May 30 when the results of a recruitment campaign were unveiled and three successful candidates randomly picked. After the draw, around 120 angry youths moved towards the port and blocked operations, said socialist deputy Abdelwahab Belfkih.

Another elected official, Lahcen Achouad, said the "demands of the young people are socio-economic in nature. They are asking for an equitable distribution of the city's wealth."