

Thousands protest utility prices in Morocco's Tangier

Thursday 5 November 2015, by [EL YAAKOUBI Aziz](#) (Date first published: 1 November 2015).

Thousands took to the streets in Morocco's northern city of Tangier late on Saturday to protest over high prices for water and electricity, in the nation's largest protest since pro-democracy marches in 2011 demanding political reforms.

Large-scale protests are rare in Morocco, where the king still holds ultimate sway. When pro-democracy unrest toppled leaders in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya in 2011, the palace managed to calm similar protests with a combination of limited reforms, spending and tougher security.

Saturday's night-time demonstration, witnessed by Reuters, was the latest in a series that started two weeks ago. It took place a day after authorities and the company running the services proposed measures to calm unrest against what protesters see as high prices and administrative mismanagement.

Water, wastewater and electricity businesses in the cities of Tangier and neighboring Tetouan have been operated since 2002 by Amendis, an affiliate of France's Veolia Environnement. Redal, another Veolia subsidiary, is operating in the capital Rabat, Sale and municipalities of Temara and Bouznika.

"Amedis go home, Tangier is not yours," chanted thousands of protesters in the city centre where dozens of small protests from different neighborhoods converged. A Reuters witness said authorities deployed hundreds of riot police and closed streets.

Many cafes and stores in the city switched off their lights and lit candles in support of the protest.

"Enough is enough. We have been protesting for years now against that company," said Mohamed Tadlaoui one of the organisers of the demonstration. "Now it is time for them to leave, and a public company should take over."

Some protesters held up two bills they had been sent in the same month.

A committee from the Interior ministry, Tangier's city council and Amendis formed after the protests started two weeks ago announced on Friday that the company will review some bills. It said it will correct any containing errors.

Amedis has blamed the government's contract programme to rescue the state-run power utility ONEE that imposed a new pricing structure in 2014. It also pointed to peak power and water demand during the summer.

"The new structure started in September 2014, but people in Tangier felt it just during the last summer when consumption soars," Chouhaid Naser, Amendis operational manager, told Reuters.

Naser said payments fell around 20 percent for July and August compared with the same period last year.

Last year, Moroccan local authorities blocked a deal by Veolia Environnement to sell its businesses in Morocco to investment fund Actis for about 370 million euros (\$504 million) due to a dispute over investments.

Sources from the company and from the government said Veolia dropped the selling plan and convinced authorities to review the concession contracts. (Editing by Patrick Markey and editing by John Stonestreet)

P.S.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/11/01/morocco-protests-idUSL8N12W07G20151101>

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