



Comoros

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The Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoros is ruled by Colonel Azali Assoumani, who took power in a coup in April 1999. The country consists of three islands (Grande Comore, Anjouan, and Moheli) and claims a fourth, Mayotte, which is governed by France. Comoros has been prone to coups and political insurrection since its independence in 1975. In April 1999, army commander Colonel Azali staged a bloodless coup and overthrew President Tadjidine Ben Said Massounde, the Interim President who had held office since the death of democratically elected President Mohamed Taki Abdoukarim in November 1998. In May 1999, Azali decreed a constitution that gave him both executive and legislative powers. In December 1999, in response to international criticism, Azali appointed a civilian prime minister, Bianrifi Tarmidi; however, Azali remains the Head of State and army Commander in Chief. In December 2000, Azali named a new civilian Prime Minister, Hamada Madi, and formed a new civilian Cabinet. When he took power, Azali said that he would step down in April 2000 and relinquish power to a democratically elected president, but by year's end, he had not done so. In response to pressure to restore civilian rule, the Government organized several committees to draft a new constitution, including the August 2000 National Congress and November 2000 Tripartite Commission. The opposition parties initially refused to participate in the Tripartite Commission, but on February 17, representatives of the Government, the Anjouan separatists, the political opposition, and civil society organizations signed a "Framework Accord for Reconciliation in Comoros," brokered by the Organization for African Unity (OAU). The Accord called for the creation of a new Tripartite Commission for National Reconciliation to develop a "New Comorian Entity" with a new constitution. Although the Commission set June as its goal for completing the constitution and December for national elections, disagreements over procedure and goals delayed completion of the draft constitution. In August representatives from each island in August debated the first draft. On December 23, the draft Constitution, which calls for the reincorporation of Anjouan, Grand Comoros, and Moheli into a new federation that would grant the islands greater autonomy, was approved overwhelmingly in a referendum described by international observers as free and fair. Under the terms of the new Constitution, President Azali had 7 days to decide to either lead the transitional government until elections in March 2002 or to stand in the elections himself; however, by year's end, he had neither stepped down from office nor withdrawn from the March 2002 election. The new Constitution provides for the continuation of an independent judiciary. In the past, both the executive and other elites influenced the outcome of cases; however, there were no reports of interventions during the year.

The Anjouan secession crisis subsided after the August 2000 signing of the "Fomboni Declaration of National Unity" by Azali and separatist leader Lieutenant Colonel Said Abeid. The Fomboni Declaration provides for a loose confederation between the islands, giving each island the ability to maintain an army and conduct its own foreign relations. In August separatist soldiers, reportedly dissatisfied with pay and promotions, started protests that led to the overthrow of Abeid in Anjouan. A three-man military commission replaced him as leader of Anjouan; Abeid fled to Mayotte and was placed under house arrest. The new military commission pledged to support the reconciliation process begun by the February Accord. Between November 3 and 4, Abeid made an unsuccessful attempt to regain control of Anjouan by attacking forces loyal to the new military commission, but he quickly was defeated. The coup attempt did not appear to threaten the Fomboni Agreement. On December 19 on Moheli, 13 French mercenaries launched a coup attempt that the army defeated after several hours of fighting. Colonel Hassan Harouna, a defense official in the government of former President Abdoukarim, was arrested the same day and accused of organizing the coup in order to prevent the December 23 referendum.

The Comorian Defense Force (FCD) and the Gendarmerie are responsible for internal security and are under Azali's direct control. Security forces committed some human rights abuses.

The economy of this extremely poor country is dominated by agriculture; the country's population is approximately 578,400. Revenues from the main crops--vanilla, essence of ylang-ylang, and cloves--continued

to fall while the population has been growing at a rate of 2.7 percent annually. Per capita income was approximately \$400 (226,500 Comorian francs) per year in 1997--the national accounts have not been updated since 1998. The country depends heavily on foreign assistance from the European Union, China, and Arab countries, including Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Libya, and the United Arab Emirates.

The Government's human rights record remained poor, and it continued to commit abuses. Citizens do not have the right to change their government. Prison conditions remained poor. Security forces and the separatist authorities on Anjouan used arbitrary arrest and detention. Authorities restricted citizens' privacy rights. There were infringements on freedom of the press and assembly and movement. The military Government limited freedom of religion, and security forces reportedly continued to threaten Christians. Societal discrimination against women and Christians continued to be serious problems. There were some instances of forced child labor.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports of the arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life by security forces on Grande Comore or Moheli; however, during a December 19 unsuccessful coup attempt on Moheli, soldiers killed four invading mercenaries; two other mercenaries were lynched by a mob. No persons were killed during the November 3-4 unsuccessful coup attempt in Anjouan.

In addition to the police and the military, there are many groups throughout Anjouan that are armed, including paramilitary forces, militias, and civilians. In 1999 battles between rival militias resulted in approximately 12 deaths; however, there were no such deaths reported during the year.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The new Constitution prohibits such practices, and there were no reports of security force brutality, and unlike in the previous year, police did not threaten Christians on Grande Comore (see Section 2.c.).

In October 2000, police used tear gas to disperse forcibly a demonstration; some protesters were arrested, although all were released by year's end following various periods of detention.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that separatist security forces tortured, beat, and otherwise abused persons on Anjouan. In August 2000, separatist authorities on Anjouan arrested approximately 100 opponents of the Fomboni Declaration, following demonstrations against the agreement. There were unconfirmed reports that as many as 28 of those arrested, who primarily were members of the Comoros Red Crescent Society and the opposition party Group for the Recovery Initiative for the Anjouan Movement (GIRMA), were tortured, and, in one case, raped. By November 2000, the Government had freed all of those arrested; however, there were no reports of government action against those persons responsible for the abuses.

In 1999 quasi-police authorities known as embargoes arrested, beat, and detained three local Christians; there was no further information on the incident at year's end.

Prison conditions continued to be poor. A lack of proper sanitation, overcrowding, inadequate medical facilities, and poor diet are common problems. The military Government has not taken action to remedy these problems. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of deaths as a result of disease in prisons during the year. Female prisoners are held separately from male prisoners. Juveniles are not imprisoned; they are returned to the custody of their parents. Pretrial detainees are not held separately from convicted prisoners.

The military Government permits prison visits by independent monitors, and two such visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Association Comorienne des Droits de l'Homme (ACDH) occurred during the year.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The new Constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention; however, teenagers, who were considered "trouble makers," occasionally were arrested arbitrarily.

In August Anjouan separatist leader Abeid fled to Mayotte after he was overthrown; he was placed under house arrest upon his arrival but was released on August 12 (see Section 3).

In March Judge Omar ben Ali of the Tribunal de premiere instance ordered the arrest of an attorney on a charge of contempt of court, allegedly because he had not followed the proper procedures in registering himself as the attorney of record in the case. On April 12, the libel case was settled out of court, and the charges against the attorney were dropped immediately.

In August 2000, authorities arrested four opposition politicians, including Cheik Ali Bacar Kassim, former Member of Parliament (M.P.) and owner of the opposition radio station Radio Tropique, for allegedly plotting to overthrow Colonel Azali. The four were detained in a military prison, despite a judge's order to transfer them to the civilian prison in Moroni (see Section 1.e.). In November 2000, one of the four escaped from prison. Two others then were released, leaving only Cheik Ali in prison. At the end of November 2000, authorities reportedly freed Cheik Ali on the condition that he leave the country; when he refused to leave, he was returned to prison. Cheik Ali reportedly was denied access to defense counsel until he launched a hunger strike in protest. In June Cheik Ali pled guilty to illegal possession of guns. He was sentenced to 2 years in prison, with 1 year suspended; in August he was released following the completion of 1 year in prison.

After the August 2000 demonstrations against the Fomboni Declaration, separatist authorities on Anjouan arrested and beat numerous opposition supporters. In September 2000, 3 of the approximately 100 persons arrested were freed by a tribunal in Anjouan's capital, Mutsamudu. The remaining 97 remained in detention, and no trial date had been scheduled by year's end.

Two Azali opponents who reportedly led a coup attempt in March 2000 continued to be detained in a military prison (see Section 3). Although one of the opponents was believed to have escaped from prison in November 2000, both opponents remained in detention at year's end. No trial had been scheduled for either opponent by year's end.

On Anjouan local authorities continued to attempt to suppress or convert the Christian minority. One Anjouanais Christian estimated that embargoes in Anjouan detained and released several days later approximately 50 Christians, both men and women in an 18-month period between 1999 and 2000. Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports of such incidents during the year.

The new Constitution prohibits forced exile, and the military Government did not use it.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The new Constitution provides for an independent judiciary; however, in the past, the executive and other elites have exercised influence over court cases, and the executive intervened in at least two cases in 2000. The Head of State names magistrates by decree. In August 2000, despite regulations that prevent the removal of judges, Colonel Azali transferred to other duties nine judges, who had initiated a strike calling for judicial reform and regular payment of salaries. In October 2000, Azali issued a presidential decree that reduced the number of Supreme Court justices from nine to five and transferred judges to other courts. Although the official reason for the action was a lack of resources, opposition critics accused Azali of punishing certain judges for questioning government policies and participating in a strike by judges and court personnel.

In the case of detained opposition politician Cheik Ali Bacar Kassim and three others, the trial judge resigned in protest when authorities failed to obey his order to transfer the opposition leaders from a military prison to a civilian prison (see Section 1.d.). Authorities stated that the poor condition of the civilian prison prohibited the transfer.

The High Council, made up of four members appointed by the President, three members elected by the Federal Assembly, and a member of each island council, also serves as the High Court of the Republic and rules on cases of Constitutional law. Trials are open to the public except for limited exceptions defined by law. The legal system incorporates Islamic law as well as French legal codes. There are very few lawyers in the country, making it difficult to obtain legal representation. The military Government does not provide legal counsel to the accused. Most disputes are presented to village elders for possible resolution before being taken to court.

There were no reports of political prisoners.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The new Constitution prohibits such actions, and the Government generally respects these prohibitions in practice. Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that police interfered with the privacy of the home. There were no known cases of arbitrary interference with correspondence.

Bans on alcohol and immodest dress are enforced sporadically, usually during religious months, such as Ramadan. Alcohol can be imported and sold with a permit from the Government.

In October 2000, several hundred Comorian illegal immigrants were evicted from their homes and places of employment after the local government in Mayotte announced new penalties against persons who housed or employed illegal immigrants (see Section 2.d.).

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The new Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the Government generally respects these rights in practice. In August 2000, former M.P. Cheik Ali Bacar Kassim, who also owns the independent radio station Radio Tropique and is a well-known opposition figure, was arrested for allegedly plotting to overthrow the Azali Government (see Sections 1.d. and 1.e.).

There are two independent newspapers that publish regularly. These newspapers exist side-by-side with the semiofficial weekly *Al-Watwan*. Some of the independent newspapers criticized the Government freely.

In March the head of Azali's political party sued the Comoros Gazette for libel after it published excerpts from party communiques; the suit was settled out of court in April.

There are two national radio stations: The government-controlled radio station, Radio Comoros; and the opposition radio station Radio Tropique. In addition there are at least 10 regional and local stations, some of which are openly critical of the Government. Residents also receive broadcasts from Mayotte Radio, as well as from French television, without government interference. In January a national television station constructed with assistance from the Government of the People's Republic of China was completed. There are several private local television stations, and satellite antennas are popular. Amateur radio licenses have been issued without hindrance in previous years.

In August 1999, an independent radio station on Anjouan, Radio Ushababi, which was opposed to the independence movement, reportedly was forced to cease broadcasting after being harassed by police and threatened on several occasions by a group of separatist militiamen. In November 2000, the station resumed broadcasting.

Foreign newspapers and books are available. Internet service was introduced in 1998.

The Government generally respects academic freedom. There is no university, but secondary students and teachers continued to speak freely and criticize the Government openly. During the year on Anjouan, teachers went on strike between May and June because they were not being paid, resulting in the closure of the schools. Teachers went on strike again from mid-September to October 22, when they received a guarantee that all arrears would be paid in full. An agreement was signed on October 19 (see Section 6.e.).

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The new Constitution provides for the freedom of assembly, and, unlike in previous years, the Government did not restrict this right in practice during the year.

The new Constitution does not provide specifically for the freedom of association; however, the Government generally respected this right in practice.

c. Freedom of Religion

The new Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the authorities infringed on this right. Islam is the official religion; however, there were no reports of official discrimination or other abuse against non-Muslims during the year. An overwhelming majority of the population is Sunni Muslim, and the Government discouraged the practice of religions other than Islam. The August 2000 Fomboni Declaration that was signed by Azali and the Anjouan separatist leader included an agreement to make Islam the national religion. Authorities restricted the right of Christians to practice their faith, and police regularly threatened and sometimes detained practicing Christians.

In previous years, the authorities held those detained for a few days and often attempted to convert them to Islam forcibly; however, there were no reports of such actions during the year. In October 1999, two citizens were arrested, tried, and convicted of "anti-Islamic activity" in part because they possessed Christian books and audiovisual material. One of the citizens was sentenced to 18 months in prison, while the other was sentenced to 4 months. One citizen was released after 4 months; it was unknown at year's end whether the other citizen was released or still was incarcerated. Although in previous years local government officials attempted to force Christians to attend services at mosques against their will, there were no reports of such incidents during the year.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that police arrested persons inside mosques while they were praying.

There are two Roman Catholic churches and one Protestant church; however, prior to the 1999 coup, the former military Government restricted the use of these three churches to noncitizens. The Government continued to restrict the use of the country's three churches to noncitizens. The Government permitted Christian missionaries to work in local hospitals and schools, but did not permit them to proselytize.

In previous years, there have been accounts of police and quasi-police authorities, known as embargoes, arresting, beating, and detaining Christians on the island of Anjouan. One Anjouanais Christian estimated that approximately 50 Christians, both men and women, were detained and released several days later by the embargoes in an 18-month period between 1999 and 2000. There were no reports of Christians being detained on Anjouan during the year. Some community authorities on Anjouan banned Christians from attending any community events and banned Christian burials in a local cemetery.

Bans on alcohol and immodest dress are enforced sporadically, usually during religious months, such as Ramadan. Alcohol can be imported and sold with a permit from the Government.

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The new Constitution provides for these rights, and, unlike in previous years, there were no reports that the Government restricted these rights during the year.

In 2000 the OAU and the Azali Government imposed sanctions on Anjouan for its failure to sign the OAU-brokered Antananarivo Accords, which would have reunited the islands by a February 2000 deadline. These sanctions included restrictions on all telecommunications, air and sea links, imports of oil and petroleum products, and nonrecognition of travel documents and passports. In May following the February signing of the Framework Accord on National Reconciliation, the OAU lifted sanctions against Anjouan; the Azali Government previously had lifted the embargo in August 2000, following the signing of the Fomboni Declaration.

There continued to be reports during the year that persons fled Grand Comore and Anjouan for Mayotte; many of these persons reportedly drowned when they attempted to reach Mayotte on rafts or by swimming.

Citizens of Mayotte sometimes harassed Comorian illegal immigrants in Mayotte. For example, in October 2000, several hundred Comorian illegal immigrants were evicted from their homes and places of employment after the local government in Mayotte announced new penalties against persons who housed or employed illegal immigrants.

The new Constitution does not provide for the granting of refugee or asylum status in accordance with the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, and the Government has not formulated a policy regarding refugees, asylees, or first asylum; however, the Government cooperates with the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations assisting refugees. During the 1990's, refugees from central Africa fled to the country. Some have received asylum in other countries; approximately 10 of these refugees remained in the country, and they were awaiting placement by the UNHCR in other countries at year's end.

There were no reports of the forced return of persons to a country where they feared persecution.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The 1999 Constitution did not provide specifically for the right of citizens to change their government, and in practice citizens have not exercised this right; however, the new Constitution, which was approved December 23 in a national referendum, provides for the right of citizens to change their government in regularly scheduled elections. Under the terms of the new Constitution, a president will be elected from a different island every 4 years, based on a rotating schedule. For the presidential election scheduled for March 10, 2002, primary elections will be held only on Grand Comore, since the first president under the new Constitution must be a Grand Comorian. Three candidates will advance from the primary to participate in the general election involving all three islands.

In 1999 in response to international criticism, Azali appointed a civilian Prime Minister, Bianrifi Tarmidi; however, Azali remains the Head of State and army Commander in Chief. When he took power, Azali said that he would step down in April 2000 and relinquish power to a democratically elected president; however, by year's end, he had not done so.

In August 2000, Azali organized a National Congress in response to pressure from his political supporters to restore civilian rule; opposition parties boycotted the Congress. The Congress agreed on a constitution in which Azali would remain Head of State, but daily government administration would be handled by the civilian Prime Minister and the Council of State, which would act as both a legislature and constituent assembly. Although the constitution was approved by the National Congress in August 2000, it was not implemented and was replaced by the February reconciliation accord.

Also in August 2000, Azali and separatist leader Abeid signed the Fomboni Declaration. The declaration called for the creation of a new Comorian entity, in which the islands would share a common policy on religion, nationality, currency, foreign relations, and defense. In November 2000, a Tripartite Commission, composed of representatives from Grande Comore, Moheli, and Anjouan, was inaugurated and charged with developing a new constitution based on the Fomboni Declaration and the constitution drafted by the National Congress. The opposition parties initially refused to participate in the Tripartite Commission, but in December 2000, they met with the Azali Government, and the OAU began mediating negotiations. Although the OAU initially had maintained the position that the OAU-brokered Antananarivo Accord was the only viable option to reunify the islands, in December 2000, the OAU stated that it would accept an agreement that maintained the territorial integrity of the country and that provided for a democratic constitutional government. In December 2000, Azali named a new civilian Prime Minister, Hamada Madi, and formed a new civilian Cabinet, which is composed of Azali supporters.

On February 17, representatives of the Government, the Anjouan separatists, the political opposition, and civil society organizations signed a Framework Accord for Reconciliation in Comoros, brokered by the OAU. The Accord called for the creation of a new Tripartite Commission for National Reconciliation to develop a new Comorian entity with a new constitution. Although the Commission set June as its goal for completing the constitution and December for national elections, disagreements over procedure and goals delayed completion of the draft constitution. In August representatives from each island debated the first draft. The Tripartite Commission then adopted a draft Constitution, which was approved by 75 percent of the voters in a December 23 referendum described by international observers as free and fair. The new Constitution provides for the reincorporation of Anjouan, Grand Comoros, and Moheli into a new federation that grants the islands greater autonomy. According to the new Constitution, the Legislative Assembly will be composed of 33 members. Of these, citizens will directly elect 18, and 15 will be selected by the Government (5 per island). Under the terms of the new Constitution, President Azali had 7 days to decide to either lead the transitional government until elections in March 2002 or to stand in the elections himself; however, by year's end, he did not step down from office or withdraw from the March 2002 election. According to the new Constitution, leaders of the transitional governments on each island also are scheduled to step down after the March 2002 elections. The other leaders did not indicate any unwillingness to abide by the terms of the agreement by year's end.

In August separatist soldiers, reportedly dissatisfied with pay and promotions, started protests that led to the overthrow of Abeid. A three-man military commission replaced him as leader of Anjouan; Abeid fled to Mayotte and was placed under house arrest. The new military commission pledged its support for the reconciliation process begun by the February Accord. Between November 2 and 3, Abeid made an unsuccessful attempt to regain control of Anjouan when he launched an attack against forces loyal to the new military commission. Abeid was defeated quickly, however, and the coup attempt did not appear to threaten the Fomboni Agreement.

On December 19 on Moheli, the army defeated a coup attempt by 13 French mercenaries after several hours

of fighting. Colonel Hassan Harouna, a former defense official in the Government of former President Abdoukarim, was arrested on December 19 and accused of organizing the coup to derail the December 23 referendum. He was in detention pending trial at year's end.

In March 2000, dissident political and army elements attempted a coup against Azali. This coup was suppressed, and the leaders of the coup were detained. The two leaders of the coup remained in prison at year's end; no trial date had been scheduled (see Section 1.d.).

There were no bans in effect on political parties, which continued to criticize the Government openly and without penalty. There are 21 political parties in the country; 5 parties represent the Azali Government, and 16 parties represent the opposition.

Village chiefs and Muslim religious leaders tend to dominate local politics. Traditional social, religious, and economic institutions also affect the country's political life in important ways.

The percentage of women in government and politics does not correspond to their percentage of the population. Two women hold senior government positions; one is the President of the Tribunal of First Instance, and the other is legal counsel to President Azali.

An overwhelming majority of the population is Sunni Muslim, and all citizens, including the small number of Christians in the country, identify themselves as Muslims for safety reasons (see Sections 2.c. and 5). There are no Christians in the Government.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international nongovernmental organizations (NGO's) generally operate without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials are cooperative and responsive to their views. However, the Comoros Human Rights Association, established in 1990, was inactive during the year due to a lack of funds.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Religion, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The new Constitution prohibits discrimination based on these factors; however, there was discrimination against women, and local communities discriminated against and harassed Christians.

Women

Domestic violence against women occurs, but medical authorities, the police, and women's groups believed that it was rare. In theory a woman could seek protection through the courts in the case of violence, but the problem is addressed most often within the extended family or at the village level.

Female genital mutilation (FGM), which is widely condemned by international health experts as damaging to both physical and psychological health, generally is not practiced.

Prostitution is illegal; however, most Comorians do not consider it to be a problem.

Men have the dominant role in society. A matriarchal African tradition affords women some rights, especially in terms of landholding. Societal discrimination against women is most apparent in rural areas where women have farming and childrearing duties, with fewer opportunities for education and wage employment. In contrast, an improvement in the status of women was most evident in the major towns, where growing numbers of women are in the labor force and generally earn wages comparable to those of men engaged in similar work; however, few women hold positions of responsibility in business. While legal discrimination exists in some areas, in general inheritance and property rights do not disfavor women. For example, the house that the father of the bride traditionally provides to the couple at the time of their marriage remains her property in the event of divorce.

Children

The Government has not taken any specific action to protect or promote children's welfare. Legal provisions that address the rights and welfare of children were not enforced because of a lack of inspectors.

Education is compulsory until the age of 10; however, attendance is not enforced. An estimated 60 percent of children attend primary school, while only 34 percent attend secondary school; 55 percent of boys attend school, and 45 percent of girls attend school.

Child abuse appears to be rare.

Child prostitution and child pornography are criminalized under the law. Unmarried children under the age of 13 are considered minors, and they are protected legally from sexual exploitation, prostitution, and pornography.

Child labor is a problem (see Sections 6.c. and 6.d.).

Persons with Disabilities

There is no discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment, education, or in the provision of other state services. There are no laws that mandate access to buildings for persons with disabilities.

Religious Minorities

There is widespread societal discrimination against Christians in all sectors of life. Christians face insults and threats of violence from members of their communities. Christians have been harassed by mobs in front of mosques and summoned for questioning by religious authorities. In some instances, families forced Christian members out of their homes or threatened them with a loss of financial support. Some Christians have had their Bibles taken by family members. Local government officials, religious authorities, and family members have attempted to force Christians to attend services at mosques against their will.

Several times early in the year, religious leaders on Anjouan and Grande Comore threatened Christians during radio broadcasts. In April in Domoni on Anjouan, a local Christian leader was summoned before local Islamic leaders and threatened. The Christian leader's father was forced to pay a fine, and the leader's family had to leave Domoni for a month. In December 2000, also in Domoni, community members set fire to the house of a Christian man while he was sleeping inside; the man escaped.

Attempts have been made to isolate Christians from village life. In September and October 1999, on Anjouan a religious leader started an unofficial campaign against Christians. Committees were formed in many villages to harass Christians, and lists of names of suspected Christians were circulated. Anti-Christian rhetoric was broadcast on the radio. This campaign resulted in threats, but there were no reports of violence.

In 1999 community members and authorities in Lingoni, Anjouan, banned Christians from attending any community events, and in Mremeni, Anjouan, they banned Christian burials in the local cemetery.

Islamic fundamentalism is growing in popularity as more students return to the country after studying Islamic subjects in foreign countries.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The new Constitution provides for the right to unionize, and the Government has not prevented industries from unionizing. Farming on small land holdings, subsistence fishing, and petty commerce make up the daily activity of most of the population. The wage labor force is small, and numbers less than 7,000 including government employees, and less than 2,000 excluding them. Teachers, civil servants, and dockworkers are unionized. Unions are independent of the Government. The new Constitution provides for the right to strike, and the right to strike has been exercised freely by public sector workers.

In previous years, government workers, teachers, and hospital workers have held strikes primarily because they were not paid for weeks at a time. There were no reports of strikes on Grande Comore or Moheli during the year; however, teachers held strikes on Anjouan during the year, which resulted in periodic school closures (see Section 2.a.). In August 2000, despite regulations that forbid the removal of judges, Colonel Azali transferred to other duties nine judges who had initiated a strike from mid-June to early-August 2000 that called for judicial reform and regular payment of salaries. There are no laws protecting strikers from retribution, but there were no known instances of retribution.

There are no restrictions on unions joining federations or affiliating with international bodies; however, none are known to do so.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The law protects workers from employer interference in their right to organize and administer their unions. Unions have the right to bargain collectively, and strikes are legal. Wages are set by employers in the small private sector and by the Government, especially the Ministries of Finance and Labor, in the larger public sector. The Labor Code, which is enforced rarely, does not include a system for resolving labor disputes, and it does not prohibit antiunion discrimination by employers.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The new Constitution prohibits forced or compulsory labor, and it generally was not practiced among adults. The Government does not prohibit forced and bonded labor by children, and there were some instances in which it occurred (see Section 6.d.). Some families place their children in the homes of others where they work long hours in exchange for food or shelter. A 2000 UNICEF study found that approximately 15 percent of children worked at jobs for which they were not paid.

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The Labor Code defines the minimum age for employment as 15 years of age. The Ministry of Labor has few resources to enforce this provision; however, child labor is not a problem due to the general lack of wage employment opportunities. Children generally help with the work of their families in the subsistence farming and fishing sectors. Population pressure and poverty forced some families to place their children in the homes of others. These children, often as young as 7 years of age, typically worked long hours as domestic servants in exchange for food and shelter.

The Government has not ratified International Labor Organization Convention 187 on the worst forms of child labor; however, the Government adheres to its provisions in practice.

The law does not prohibit forced or bonded labor by children, and there were some instances in which it occurred (see Section 6.c.).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no minimum wage. In previous years, the Government has paid workers late or failed to pay them at all; however, during the year, government workers were paid more regularly (see Section 6.a.). On Anjouan teachers went on strike several times during the year because they were not being paid, resulting in the closure of the schools (see Section 2.a.). On October 19, an agreement was signed after the teachers were promised back payments on unpaid salaries and official recognition from local officials of their status as teachers.

The Labor Code specifies 1 day off per week plus 1 month of paid vacation per year, but the Government has not set a standard workweek.

There are no safety or health standards for the minuscule manufacturing sector.

Legal foreign workers are protected by law; however, there are no such provisions in the law to protect illegal foreign workers.

f. Trafficking in Persons

The law does not prohibit trafficking in persons; however, there were no reports that persons were trafficked to, from, or within the country.