

Comoros 2024 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

The January presidential elections lacked transparency and were hampered by irregularities, as documented by international and domestic observers. The opposition did not recognize the results due to allegations of ballot stuffing, intimidation, and harassment. Popular rejection of the results led to several days of widespread looting and violence following the announcement of preliminary results.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings; arbitrary arrest or detention; serious restrictions on free expression and media freedom, including violence and threats of violence against journalists and unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists; restrictions of religious freedom; and significant presence of the worst forms of child labor.

The government sometimes took steps to identify and dismiss officials who committed human rights abuses but rarely prosecuted them.

Section 1. Life

a. Extrajudicial Killings

There was one report the government or its agents committed an arbitrary or unlawful killing during the year.

On September 13, Ahmed Abdou, a gendarme, assaulted and injured President Azali Assoumani with a knife. Security forces immediately took Abdou into custody for questioning. On September 14, the public prosecutor declared the assailant had been found dead in solitary confinement that morning without any injuries.

In the weeks following Abdou's death, several local media outlets, including *Comores-infos*, reported allegations his body displayed signs of torture, and alleged photographs of his mutilated body circulated on social media.

Authorities arrested several members of his close family and then released them after a week in custody, allegedly after telling them not to speak of the reported abuse. Abdou's mother, father, and other family members fled to the nearby French island of Mayotte. In November, the family filed a lawsuit in Paris against the public prosecutor, alleging "torture, persecution, and obstruction of the truth" concerning Abdou's death in custody.

On September 25, the public prosecutor announced the doctor who examined Abdou's body found no physical trauma and pronounced the

investigation closed.

b. Coercion in Population Control

There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

Section 2. Liberty

a. Freedom of the Press

The constitution and law provided for freedom of speech, including for members of the press although not explicitly for other media. Authorities imposed restrictions. Individuals could not criticize the government or raise matters of public interest without constraint. Authorities reportedly detained individuals for making public statements, including online statements, critical of the president.

Physical Attacks, Imprisonment, and Pressure

Journalists were subjected to harassment or intimidation by government authorities due to their reporting.

For example, on September 18, authorities detained several journalists for reporting allegations of torture of Ahmed Abdou, a gendarme who attacked President Azali on September 13 (see section 1.a.). Authorities released the

journalists after several hours in custody.

Censorship by Governments, Military, Intelligence, or Police Forces, Criminal Groups, or Armed Extremist or Rebel Groups

Independent media operated with restriction and self-censorship due to government reprisal. Some journalists practiced self-censorship due to the risk of violence and harassment, and other journalists, fearing retribution, self-censored discussions of political matters.

b. Worker Rights

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

The law provided for the right of workers to form and join independent unions. The law provided unions the right to bargain collectively, although no regulatory structure existed for collective bargaining in either the public or private sector. The law provided for the right to strike but required an eight-day notification period and a declaration of the reason for the strike and its duration. Civil servants had to provide 15 days' notice. Strikes were restricted to work-related topics. Some categories of workers were prohibited from striking, such as members of the military, magistrates, and senior officials.

The law did not prohibit antiunion discrimination by employers in hiring practices or other employment functions, and it did not require

reinstatement of workers fired for union activity.

The government did not effectively enforce laws protecting freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike. Penalties for violations of these laws were commensurate with those for analogous violations, such as civil rights violations, but were seldom applied.

Common practices restricting rights included unfair and abusive dismissal practices, such as dismissing employees without giving proper notice or paying the required severance pay.

Forced or Compulsory Labor

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Acceptable Work Conditions

Wage and Hour Laws

The law did not provide for a minimum wage. The law provided for a 40-hour work week, except in the agriculture sector, where it set the maximum hours of work at 2,340 per year (equivalent to 45 hours per week). Alleged violations of wage, hour, or overtime laws were common in the agriculture, fishing, and construction sectors.

Occupational Safety and Health

The law did not include appropriate occupational safety and health (OSH) standards explicitly for the main industries in the country. Government OSH experts did not proactively identify unsafe working conditions. It was unknown whether workers lodged OSH complaints. Workers could remove themselves from situations endangering health or safety without jeopardy to their employment. Sectors in which alleged violation of OSH standards were most probable were construction, ports, fishing, agriculture, and public works such as road building.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement

The government did not effectively enforce wage, hour, and OSH laws, or act effectively to prevent violations. Penalties were not commensurate with those for similar violations. Penalties were rarely applied against violators. The Ministry of Youth, Employment, Labor, Sport, and Cultural Arts was responsible for enforcement.

Although inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate financial sanctions, the number of inspectors was insufficient to enforce compliance.

According to the World Bank, the informal sector was estimated to be 73 percent of the total workforce. Workers in the informal sector were not covered by wage, hour, OSH, or other labor laws and inspections.

c. Disappearance and Abduction

Disappearance

There were no reports of enforced disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

Prolonged Detention without Charges

The law required judicial arrest warrants and prosecutorial approval to detain persons longer than 24 hours without charge. The law provided for prompt judicial determination of the legality of detention and for detainees to be informed promptly of the charges against them. A magistrate informed detainees of their rights, including the right to legal representation. These rights were inconsistently respected. The bail system prohibited persons on bail from leaving the country. Some detainees did not have prompt access to attorneys or their families.

There were reports of persons being temporarily detained for organizing political demonstrations, expressing their political views, or criticizing the government.

In April, local media reported authorities arrested an Islamic preacher for having questioned fasting during local journeys. Authorities released him after a brief detention.

Lengthy pretrial detention was a problem. The law limited pretrial detention to four months, although a magistrate or prosecutor could extend this period. Detainees routinely awaited trial for extended periods for reasons such as administrative delay, case backlog, and time-consuming collection of evidence. Some extensions continued for several years and for many persons exceeded the maximum sentences for their alleged crimes. For example, in August 2023 a court acquitted a man arrested for alleged abuse and human trafficking after nearly two years' detention.

d. Violations in Religious Freedom

See the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

e. Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Section 3. Security of the Person

a. Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The constitution and law prohibited such practices. Local media reported

allegations of physical abuse and death of a gendarme in custody (see section 1.a.).

b. Protection of Children

Child Labor

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings/>.

Child Marriage

The legal minimum age of marriage was 18. The government enforced the law effectively. The government engaged in prevention and mitigation efforts. In recent years, the government conducted sensitization campaigns aimed at imams and high school age youth on the problem of child marriage.

c. Protection to Refugees

The government cooperated, with some exceptions, with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern.

Provision of First Asylum

The law did not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government did not have a system for providing protection to refugees. Refugee status determinations were made by UNHCR under its mandate.

d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement

There was no known Jewish population, and there were no reports of antisemitic incidents.