

# Comoros

Stable / Unchanged —



## Religion

## Population

## Area

- Muslims : **98.3%**
- Ethnoreligionists : **1.0%**
- Others : **0.7%**

807.000

2.235 Km<sup>2</sup>

## Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

According to the 2001 constitution, Islam is the state religion.<sup>[1]</sup> The constitution's preamble affirms equality in rights and duties without making any reference to sex, origin, race, religion or belief.<sup>[2]</sup> Religion falls under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Union (Article 9).<sup>[3]</sup>

Not all Islamic groups are allowed in Comoros. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs only the Sunni Shafiite rite of the *Ahlu Sunnah wal Jamaah* doctrine is allowed in the country.<sup>[4]</sup> All forms of proselytism or religious propaganda of all religions other than the above-mentioned Sunni school are prohibited. Foreigners involved in such activities may be deported.

There is continuous pressure and intimidation against any local converts to Christianity; foreigners, however, are free of this threat.<sup>[5]</sup> Pressure to conform to orthodox Muslim regulations and customs are felt everywhere. The government does not seem to be even-handed in its punishment of followers of other religions.<sup>[6]</sup>

The Ministry of Internal Affairs is working with the National Mufti Council (*muftiate*) to improve control over imams and preachers by introducing a "professional card" of academic and religious competence.<sup>[7]</sup> It seems this move is intended to prevent religious radicalism.

## Incidents

On 11<sup>th</sup> October 2016, the Ministry of Internal Affairs issued a ban on non-Sunni practices.<sup>[8]</sup> Over the following days, some Shi'a clerics in Moroni and Mutsamudu were temporarily arrested after they were caught celebrating the Ashura

Festival in private homes.<sup>[9]</sup>

On 30<sup>th</sup> November 2016, the Council of Ministers banned the celebration of the Mawlid (Birth of the Prophet) festival in all state corporations, but allowed the one organised by the government in Independence Square!<sup>[10]</sup>

Government officials ordered that the minarets of an Ahmadiyya Muslim mosque in Anjouan be torn down on 8<sup>th</sup> January 2017. The Minister of Internal Affairs Mohamed Daoudou ordered the demolition, accusing the Ahmadis of supporting sedition. The rest of the building was turned into a police station.<sup>[11]</sup> In a statement, the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs distanced itself from this decision.<sup>[12]</sup>

On 4<sup>th</sup> April 2017, the ulemas of Comoros called on the government to take measures to stop local radios from broadcasting “Yiyo Yiremwa”, a song by local artist Ali Combo, claiming the song “threatens good practices”<sup>[13]</sup>

On 4<sup>th</sup> September 2017, the authorities in the village of Nioumadzaha Bambao (Ngazidja) chased away a local preacher nicknamed “Pilote” after accusing him of supporting “subversive” religious ideas!<sup>[14]</sup>

Twenty-eight people were sentenced on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2017 to between one and two months in prison for celebrating the Aid-el-Kebir on Friday 1<sup>st</sup> September instead of Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> September, the officially designated day set by the Grand Mufti. They had been accused of threatening social cohesion and religious unity!<sup>[15]</sup> The public prosecutor stressed that the Comoros is not a secular state.<sup>[16]</sup>

## Prospects for freedom of religion

There is no freedom of religion in Comoros except for the one Sunni Shafiite rite. There is no indication that there will be any changes in the near future.

## Endnotes / Sources

[1] ‘Comoros’, ARDA (Association of Religion Data Archives), [http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country\\_56\\_6.asp](http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_56_6.asp), (accessed 14th March 2018).

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Cf. A presidential decree was issued on this subject in early 2013. More recently, there was a circular note by the Minister of Internal Affairs dated 11th October 2016, reprinted in ‘Islam: Seul le rite chaféite est autorisé en Union des Comores’, Ndzuwani-2016 [web blog], <http://ndzuwani-2016.skyrock.com/3284044682-Islam-Seul-le-rite-chafeite-est-autorise-en-Union-des-Comores.html>, (accessed 14 March 2018).

[5] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, ‘Comoros, International Religious Freedom Report for 2016, U.S. State Department, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, (accessed 8th February 2018).

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ali Abdou, ‘Religion : Vers la mise en place de la carte professionnelle des prêcheurs et imams’ , Al-Watwan, 19th January 2018, <http://www.alwatwan.net/societe/religion-vers-la-mise-en-place-de-la-carte-professionnelle-des-prêcheurs-et-imams.html>, (accessed 14th March 2018).

[8] Cf. Ndzuwani-2016 blog, op. cit.

[9] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, op. cit.

[10] Apparently this decision is more economically than religiously motivated (lack of budget for celebrations. See 'Les « Maoulid » bannis dans les sociétés d'État', 2nd December 2016, La Gazette des Comores, <http://lagazettedescomores.com/soci%C3%A9t%C3%A9/libert%C3%A9-de-culte/d%C3%A9molition-partielle-d%E2%80%99une-mosqu%C3%A9e-ahmadiyya-le-ministre-de-l%E2%80%99int%C3%A9rieur-s%E2%80%99explique.html>, (accessed 14th March 2018).

[11] 'Liberté de culte/démolition partielle d'une mosquée Ahmadiyya: El ministre de l'intérieur s'explique', La Gazette des Comores, 11th January 2017, <http://lagazettedescomores.com/soci%C3%A9t%C3%A9/libert%C3%A9-de-culte/d%C3%A9molition-partielle-d%E2%80%99une-mosqu%C3%A9e-ahmadiyya-le-ministre-de-l%E2%80%99int%C3%A9rieur-s%E2%80%99explique.html>, (accessed 14th March 2018); 'Opération de 'destruction' d'une mosquée 'Ahmadiyya' à Anjouan', Habariza Komori, 8th January 2017, <http://www.habarizacomores.com/2017/01/operation-de-destruction-dune-mosquee.html>, (accessed 14th March 2018).

[12] Maoulida Mbaé, 'Destruction de la mosquée Ahmadiyya / Le premier flic désavoué par le ministère des affaires religieuses', La Gazette des Comores, 13th January 2017, <http://lagazettedescomores.com/soci%C3%A9t%C3%A9/destruction-de-la-mosqu%C3%A9e-ahmadiyya-/le-premier-flic-d%C3%A9savou%C3%A9-par-le-minist%C3%A8re-des-affaires-religieuses.html>, (accessed 14th March 2018).

[13] 'Les ulémas s'élèvent contre le tube d'Ali combo', Al-Watwan, 4th April 2017, <http://www.alwatwan.net/societe/les-ul%C3%A9mas-s%E2%80%99%C3%A9l%C3%A8vent-contre-le-tube-d%E2%80%99ali-combo.html>, (accessed 14th March 2018).

[14] Toufé Maecha, 'Nioumadzaha Bambao: 'Un prédicateur chassé du village pour ses opinions religieuses jugées 'subversives'', La Gazette des Comores, 4th September 2017, <http://lagazettedescomores.com/société/nioumadzaha-bambao-un-prédicateur-chassé-du-village-pour-ses-opinions-religieuses-jugées-«-subversives-»-.html>, (accessed 14 March 2018).

[15] 'Comores: la justice condamne des musulmans pour avoir désobéi au grand mufti', RFI, 9th September 2017, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20170909-comores-verdict-justice-affaire-dissidents-aid-el-kebir>, (accessed 14th March 2018).

[16] Nazir Nazi, 'Fête de l'Aïd el-kabir : "Nous ne sommes pas un État laïc', Al Watwan, 5th September 2017, <http://www.alwatwan.net/societe/f%C3%AAt%C3%A9-de-l%E2%80%99aid-el-kabir-%E2%80%9Cnous-ne-sommes-pas-un-etat-la%C3%A9c%E2%80%9D.html>, (accessed 14th March 2018).