

ORGANISATION OF AFRICAN UNITY



ORGANISATION DE L'UNITÉ AFRICAINE

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CONFLICT PREVENTION, MANAGEMENT AND
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**REPORT OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL ON THE
SITUATION IN THE COMOROS**

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I. Introduction

1. It will be recalled that the situation in the Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoros was extensively discussed during the 74th Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers, held in Lusaka, Zambia, from 5 to 8 July 2001. At the end of the deliberations, Council adopted Decision CM/Dec.591 (LXXIV) in which it, inter alia:

- i) welcomed the progress achieved in the implementation of the Framework Agreement for Reconciliation in the Comoros, signed on 17 February 2001, in particular the establishment and the commencement of work of nearly all the Commissions and sub-Commissions provided for in the Framework Agreement;
- ii) decided, on the recommendation of the countries of the Region and the OAU Troika, and taking into account the progress achieved in the reconciliation process, to lift definitively the measures adopted by the OAU against the leadership of the Anjouanese separatist movement.

2. Prior to the consideration of this issue by Council, the Ministers of the countries of the Region and the OAU Troika held an informal meeting on 5 July 2001, on the margins of the 74th Ordinary Session of Council. During their meeting, the Ministers reviewed the situation in the country in the light of the outcome of the Ministerial visit to the Archipelago, which took place from 4 to 7 June 2001. The Ministers also agreed, among other decisions, to dispatch an OAU delegation to the Comoros, to be led by the Special Envoy of the Secretary General to the Comoros, Minister Francisco Madeira.

3. This report reviews the status of implementation of the Framework Agreement, highlights some important issues that are still unresolved and proposes some recommendations on the way forward.

II. Status of Implementation of the Framework Agreement

4. The Central Organ may wish to note that nearly all the implementation instruments provided for in the Framework Agreement have been set up and are in operation. They include the Follow-up Committee, the Tripartite Commission for National Reconciliation and the Definition of the New Comorian Ensemble, and the Independent National Electoral Commission.

5. The Follow-up Committee, the first such instrument to be set up, is composed of nine (9) members, who represent the three main Comorian parties (i.e. the Central Government, the Authority of Anjouan and the Opposition), as well as representatives of the OAU, La Francophonie, the League of Arab States and the Government of Mauritius. It was formally set up on 15 March 2001, but it began to operate effectively on 5 April 2001. The Follow-up Committee meets once a month in ordinary sessions, and in extraordinary sessions, if necessary. A Bureau, comprising representatives of the three main significant parties, is in charge of managing the day to day affairs of the Follow-up Committee.
6. The establishment of the Tripartite Commission took place on 20 May 2001. The Tripartite Commission is composed of 72 members, in a proportion of 24 delegates per Island. The delegation of each island includes eight (8) representatives of the three main Parties, in conformity with paragraph 8(i) of the Framework Agreement. The Tripartite Commission is headquartered in Moheli.
7. During its first meeting, which took place from 21 to 23 May 2001, the Tripartite Commission established the organs that are provided for in the Framework Agreement under its authority. They include the Independent National Electoral Commission, the Law Sub-Commission (i.e. in charge of the drafting of the Constitution), and the Sub-Commission in charge of weapons collection and the reinsertion of the youth. It also created a sub-Commission in charge of public assets (*patrimoine* in French) and financial mechanisms.
8. The Independent National Electoral Commission is composed of 27 members, divided equally among the three main Parties in the three Islands. Although, in the spirit of the Framework Agreement, it is the Tripartite Commission that has the authority to set up the Independent National Electoral Commission, members of the Electoral Commission are nonetheless independently selected by the parties they represent. The Electoral Commission has its headquarters in Anjouan.
9. The Law sub-Commission, which was set up in May 2001 as part of the Tripartite Commission, is already in operation. It comprises 27 members, divided equally among the three main Parties in the three Islands. The Law sub-Commission operates from Moheli.
10. As this report was being finalized, preparations were under way for the setting up of the sub-Commission in charge of weapons collection and the reinsertion of the youths. Once established, the sub-Commission will have its headquarters in Anjouan. Similarly, a sub-Commission in charge of public assets and financial mechanisms was also to be established, in accordance with Paragraph 9 (iii) of the Framework Agreement. This sub-Commission will be

responsible for the inventory of all property and the assessment of the assets, liabilities, interests payments on domestic and foreign debts, as well as investments by the Comoros since independence. The sub-Commission, whose membership is constituted along the same format as the other Commissions and sub-Commissions, will be headquartered in Moroni.

11. The Central Organ may wish to note the fact that the National Independent Electoral Commission has met for two weeks and, with the assistance of a UNDP expert in electoral matters and OAU funding, produced a provisional electoral calendar. A proposal has been made for all the activities related to the electoral process - including census, voter registration, education and sensitization, the training of electoral assessors, the printing of electoral cards, as well as the gathering of the required logistics - to begin in September 2001. Meanwhile, the revision of the electoral code is underway; it will be finalized after the adoption of the constitution. The calendar also proposed that a referendum takes place in December 2001, and the general elections be held anytime between February and May 2002. According to the calendar, the setting up of the new institutional framework should be finalized by the end of May or the beginning of June 2002.

12. On its part, the Law sub-Commission met for 18 days last July, to begin the drafting of the Constitution. However, when it reached an impasse, its Bureau requested the *Praesidium* of the Tripartite Commission to refer the matter to the Follow-up Committee. After examining the proposals of the Law Sub-Commission, the Follow-up Committee prepared a document containing the points of agreement and disagreement on the institutions and powers of the New Comorian Ensemble and the Islands. The Follow-up Committee also agreed to submit that document to the national and international experts on constitutional matters for their consideration and guidance.

13. Subsequently, during a World Bank sponsored meeting of the Friends of the Comoros, held in Paris, France, on 5 July 2001, the Comorian Government made a request to the international community gathered in Paris for international Experts on constitutional issues, to assist the Comorian Experts in the drafting of a new Constitution. The European Union dispatched one such Expert, the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie provided two Experts, while the OAU provided one Expert from Madagascar. The four international Experts met in Moroni with their six Comorian counterparts (two per island) and began their work on Wednesday 1 August 2001. As this report was being finalized, the experts had already completed the first draft of the Constitution, which would later be submitted to the Follow-up Committee and the Tripartite Commission for discussions. I wish to reiterate the gratitude of the OAU to the Government of Madagascar for availing us of the services and expertise of one of its most senior Advisers on constitutional issues.

14. The importance of weapons collection, especially in Anjouan, in ensuring personal security during the preparations for, and conduct of, the constitutional referendum and general elections can hardly be over-emphasized. The Central Organ may wish to take note of the dire need for funds to support this project. Already, the World Bank has pledged approximately \$800,000, but only for the youth reinsertion part of the project, and the African Development Bank roughly has indicated that it would provide \$700,000 for various training and capacity building projects.
15. There are divergences of view between the World Bank and the Comorian authorities, which continue to persist over this particular issue. According to the Comorian authorities, the World Bank has chosen an international NGO (CARE International) to carry out the youth reinsertion project, and has indicated that this activity will start only after all weapons have been collected. However, the Comorian authorities, particularly the authority of Anjouan, are of the view that youth reinsertion should take place before - or, at the very least, concurrently with - weapons collection. They stress that since the possession of a weapon has become a source of income, alternative sources should be offered to gun owners before they are asked to turn in the weapons in their possession.
16. On its part, and considering the gravity of the problem, the General Secretariat requested (and obtained) from the Government of South Africa approval for the designation of a military/intelligence Officer to be deployed in the Comoros, under the auspices of the OAU and as soon as the sub-Commission for weapons collection is set up, to assist the Comorian parties in this project. I wish to reiterate the gratitude of the OAU to the Government of South Africa for providing this Expert and for its continued involvement in the consolidation of the reconciliation process in the Comoros and the return of the country to constitutional rule.
17. The Central Organ will recall that, in response to OAU's appeal to Member States and the international community to assist in the implementation of the Framework Agreement, South Africa, Madagascar, Mauritius and Mozambique made or pledged financial contributions to the implementation process and for humanitarian assistance. Those contributions complemented the amount already provided by the General Secretariat to facilitate the implementation process and provide humanitarian assistance to Anjouan.
18. With regard to the urgent issue of bringing about the economic recovery and the long-term socio-economic development of the Comoros, preparations are under way by the General Secretariat and the Government of Mauritius for the convening of a donor's conference on the Comoros, during the first quarter of 2002. In addition, and as alluded to earlier in this Report, an informal meeting of

the Friends of the Comoros was held in Paris on 5 July 2001, under the auspices of the Comorian Government, with the assistance of the World Bank. The meeting was aimed at mobilizing funds for emergency poverty reduction programs, as well as the decentralization and reconciliation processes. At the end of the meeting, pledges amounting to \$11.7 million were made. They include a \$1-million line of credit offered by the Government of Mauritius; \$1.5 million pledged by the European Union in support of poverty reduction and the electoral process; \$700,000 by the African Development Bank for poverty reduction and capacity building in the financial sector; \$400,000 by La Francophonie; and \$6.8million by the World Bank, of which \$6million is allocated for financing the emergency programme, and \$800,000 for the youth reinsertion project. The League of Arab States announced contributions made at the Aman Summit for about \$10 million, part of which has already been disbursed.

III. Outcome of the OAU Mission to the Comoros

19. As indicated earlier, an OAU delegation traveled to the Comoros from 23 to 28 July 2001, pursuant to the request made by the Ministers of the countries of the Region and the OAU Troika during their informal meeting in Lusaka on 5 July 2001. Designed to build on the momentum generated by the Ministerial visit to the Comoros, which took place from 4 to 7 June 2001, the Mission included representatives of South Africa, Madagascar and Zambia.

20. During its visit, the OAU delegation noted that in spite of allegations concerning the existence of some fringe separatist elements on all three islands, including in Mayotte, all the political forces, as well as civil society, remain committed to the unity and territorial integrity of the Comoros. There is a general sense that the implementation process is moving forward as nearly all the Commissions and Sub-Commissions are at work, albeit with some difficulties.

21. The OAU mission was also informed that in order to reinforce national unity, the Comorian Government had, during the Paris meeting of the Friends of the Comoros, committed itself to the settlement of the foreign debt of the country, about 60 % of which, it claimed, was used for projects in Anjouan. The Government also informed the delegation that it had paid the salaries of civil servants in Anjouan for the two months that preceded the onset of the separatist crisis in August 1997, and that it spends on average 36 millions Comorian Francs a month on salaries in Moheli, whereas this island only contributes 4 million Comorian Francs a month to the national treasury.

22. The Comorian Prime Minister, Mr. Hamada Madi Bolero, briefed the delegation on the ongoing negotiations with Anjouan regarding the modalities for the formation of the Transitional Government of National Unity. Decoding to him, among the issues under consideration, are the following :

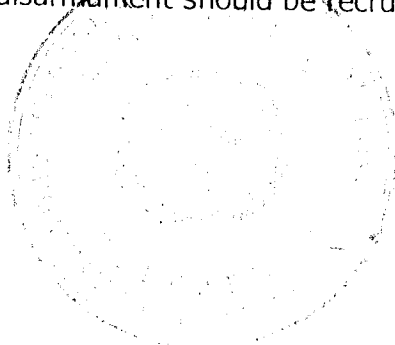
- i. The mode of allocating cabinet posts to the three Islands;
- ii. The citing of some Ministries in Moheli and Anjouan;
- iii. The creation of the post of Deputy Ministers;

23. The OAU delegation also noted that all the Parties recognized the need for the islands to enjoy a degree of autonomy from the central Government, which would enable them to meet the needs and expectations of their own populations. They, however, stressed that the autonomy of the islands should not lead to the break up of the country and that it should be exercised within the framework of the respect for the unity and territorial integrity of the country.

24. In this regard, the majority of the Comorian parties stressed that they would prefer the establishment of a central Government with sufficient powers to preserve the unity and territorial integrity of the country, while giving greater autonomy to the islands. Some considered that the powers determined for the New Comorian Ensemble by the Framework Agreement should be the only ones to be exercised by the Central Government. Others, however, believed this to be a strategy by the separatist fringe to conceal its real intentions.

25. All the Comorian parties acknowledged to the OAU delegation that the timeframe set in the Framework Agreement could not be respected, and attributed the delay mainly to the lack of resources. The Opposition and civil society were generally of the view that the timeframe could be accelerated so that the elections could be held in the first quarter of 2002. In their view, the draft Constitution could be finalized by the end of August 2001, the referendum held by the end of September 2001, and the Transitional Government of National Unity formed by 7 October 2001. However, the Government and the Authority of Anjouan were of the view that a longer timeframe may be required. Over all, there is a weak consensus that the constitutional referendum could be organized by the end of 2001, the general elections during the first quarter of 2002, and the new institutions established by June 2002.

26. With regard to weapons collection, it was recalled that a Commission on defence matters was set up by the Comorian Government in the last quarter of 2000 to identify, in close collaboration with the Authority of Anjouan, weapons in circulation in Anjouan and modalities for their collection. The Commission, which is made up of military officers from Anjouan and Grand Comoros, met twice in Anjouan for this purpose, but it has not met since February 2001. A point of view was expressed that since the necessary information on this issue has already been gathered by the Comorian military experts, international experts in weapons collection and disarmament should be recruited immediately to assist in this exercise.



27. All the parties identified the lack of resources as the main reason why the implementation instruments are not operating effectively. The Government indicated that one solution could be that all the implementation instruments be housed in one central location to simplify logistics and reduce financial costs. According to the Representatives of the Government, one or two government buildings could be made available for that purpose. The Government also indicated that the first instalment (\$6 million) of the World Bank funds could be made available in August 2001. Part of that money would be used to finance the implementation process.

28. The Government, the opposition and civil society referred to the need to provide security guarantees to the parties as the crisis is being resolved. No specifics were given about such guarantees, but they seemed to revolve around the issues of the weapons collection and reinsertion of the youth. Reference was also made to some form of political guarantees for some of the political actors in the current dispensation.

29. All the partners acknowledged the central role of the OAU in resolving the crisis in the Comoros. They also stressed that the Comorian crisis has its roots in the extensive poverty affecting the country. The electoral process and the return of the country to constitutional rule should therefore be closely associated with poverty reduction efforts, and that political instability should be addressed at the same time as financial and economic instability. In this regard, it was stressed that the key element for the success of the ongoing undertaking is the Constitution.

30. The OAU partners also stressed the need to co-ordinate the efforts of the international community and to seek better ways of streamlining the implementation process. They also endorsed the proposal of the OAU on the convening, at the earliest opportunity, of a co-ordination meeting, to be held at Ministerial level, between the countries of the Region, the OAU international partners involved in the Comoros and any other country interested in the process.

31. On the whole, consensus emerged among the OAU partners on the following elements:

- i. mobilization of logistics should begin in August 2001;
- ii. population census should begin in September 2001;
- iii. draft constitution should be finalized by the end of September 2001;
- iv. referendum should be held in November/December 2001;
- v. Transitional Government of National Unity should be formed in November/December 2001, and

vi. general elections should be organized starting from March 2002.

32. Throughout its consultations with all the parties the OAU delegation insisted on the need for the parties to maintain dialogue and the spirit of mutual accommodation. It reiterated the OAU conviction that the primary responsibility for resolving the crisis in the Comoros rests with the Comorians first and foremost. The OAU and the international community at large are prepared to back up the efforts of the Comorian parties, but they cannot replace them. This was the central message given to all the key actors in Grand Comoros, Moheli and in Anjouan.

IV. Recent Developments

33. As this report was being finalized, news concerning an uprising by the military and the Gendarmerie in Anjouan was received in the General Secretariat. According to information available, the uprising, which began on 7 August 2001, had its roots in the dissatisfaction felt by some law enforcement elements in the island over what they considered as unfair promotions decided by Colonel Abeid on 3 August 2001. These soldiers also protested against the non-payment by the authority of Anjouan of their monthly salaries. It should be recalled that Anjouan is confronted with an enormous backlog of salary arrears in the civil service and the military, for about 30 months according to some estimates. During their protest, elements of the Anjouanese military and gendarmes closed the airport and the seaport, and took over the gasoline depot in Mutsamudu.

34. On the morning of 8 August 2001, there were reports that calm had returned to Anjouan and that the military uprising was over. However, early in the afternoon, there were fresh reports of renewed mutinies and the possibility of a "putsch" against Colonel Abeid.

35. Upon receiving confirmation of the "putsch" later in the afternoon, I issued a Communiqué in which I deplored the unfolding crisis in the Island and the fact that such a development, if not properly handled, could cause further instability in the Comoros at this particular stage where its leaders and entire population are mobilized for reconciliation and the maintenance of the unity and territorial integrity of the Comoros, the return of the country to constitutional order and democratic governance, as well as economic recovery and development. I also emphasized that the ongoing reconciliation process, which has been firmly supported and encouraged by the Organization of African Unity with the assistance of the international community, should suffer no setbacks as a result of the unfolding events in Anjouan. I reiterated OAU's commitment to ensure that the ongoing reconciliation process is carried out with speed and in strict accordance with the Framework Agreement for Reconciliation in the Comoros of 17 February 2001, which all the Comorian parties and the

international community at large consider as the most viable framework for the restoration of the unity and territorial integrity of the Comoros, the return of the country to constitutional order, and the building of an all-inclusive system of participatory democracy.

36. In order to ensure a coordinated international response to the situation in Anjouan, there were consultations with the Secretary General of the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie*, Dr. Boutros Boutros Ghali, on the unfolding events in Anjouan. There was an agreement on the relevance and importance of sustaining the ongoing efforts to implement the Framework Agreement for reconciliation in the Comoros. In this regard, I appealed to the international community at large, particularly to all OAU Partners involved in the Comoros, to continue to assist the Comorian authorities and people in their efforts to implement the Framework Agreement and achieve the speedy return of their country to constitutional order.

37. The "putsch" against Colonel Abeid has unforeseen consequences on the fragile stability of the Comoros. Its impact on the reconciliation process is still unknown. However, the Central Organ may wish to take note of the fact that the Follow-up Committee, which was meeting in Moheli at the time the putsch took place, had suspended its session. Coincidentally, it was during that session that the draft constitution for the New Comorian Ensemble, prepared by a team of international and national experts on constitutional matters, was due to be discussed.

38. At the time this report was being finalized, the Transitional Politico-Military Commission (*Commission politico-militaire de transition*, i.e. the new military leadership in Anjouan) had formed a triumvirate jointly presided over by three Officers, which will be in charge of running the Island for a transitional period whose duration has been set to conform with the time-frame established by the Framework Agreement for the completion of the reconciliation process in the Comoros. The Transitional Politico-Military Commission has also reaffirmed its commitment to the Framework Agreement and to its implementation. It has emphasized the need for all the ten Commissions and sub-Commissions to pursue their work, and has urged all the Anjouanese participating in the implementation Organs to continue to do so. Meanwhile, several news agencies have reported that Colonel Said Abeid has since left Anjouan for Mayotte.

V. Observations

39. All the Comorian parties have reaffirmed their commitment to the Framework Agreement and to its implementation. Nearly all the implementation instruments provided for in the Framework Agreement have been set up and are in operation. In particular, it should be noted that the Follow-Up Committee has

endeavoured to spearhead the drafting of the constitution by generating a consensus on the parameters for the New Comorian Ensemble, as well as the disposition expressed by all the Comorian parties to seek the assistance of international experts in the process of drafting the Constitution.

40. Serious difficulties, including the inadequacy of resources and the recent developments in Anjouan, may impede the speedy implementation of the Framework Agreement.

41. A pervasive feeling of mistrust runs deep among the Comorian political class, in particular concerning the political motives of the parties on the future of the country. Frequent allegations of lack of sincerity and genuine commitment to the reconciliation process, coupled with feelings of exclusion, notably by the opposition and some representatives of Moheli, have somewhat reinforced the atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion.

42. The OAU partners are ready, available and prepared to work with the OAU as co-ordinator to help the Comorians move forward with speed and resolve in the implementation process.

VI. Conclusion

43. As this Report has made clear, it is obvious that the reconciliation process in the Comoros is still fraught with serious difficulties. The Central Organ must therefore continue to lend its strong support to the efforts of the countries of the Region and the OAU Troika by encouraging all the Comorian parties to continue implement the Framework Agreement and ensure the restoration of the unity and territorial integrity of the Comoros, as well as the speedy return of the country to constitutional order and democratic governance.

44. In the light of the foregoing, the following recommendations are submitted for the consideration of the Central Organ:

- i. Given the lack of adequate resources to finance the implementation of the Framework Agreement, the Central Organ should call upon Member States to make voluntary contributions to the OAU Peace Fund to ensure that the reconciliation process in the Comoros is not undermined as a result of lack of funds;
- ii. The importance of implementing the decision on weapons collection cannot be overemphasized, as it will provide security guarantees to all the Comorians during the referendum and general elections. The Central Organ is requested to appeal to all Member States and the international community at large, to provide the Comorian

authorities with the necessary expertise and funds to enable them undertake the weapons collection under international supervision exercise as soon as possible;

- iii. Considering the high level of poverty in the three islands, the paucity of economic resources and the deep socio-economic problems facing the Comoros, which are at the heart of the crisis in the Archipelago, the Central Organ should encourage efforts aimed at economic recovery, poverty reduction and the long-term development of the country. In this regard, appeal should be made to Member States and the international community to participate actively in the donors conference for the Comoros, which is scheduled to take place in Mauritius during the first quarter of 2002.