

THE COMOROS facing the Covid-19 crisis

Context

Located at the northern end of the Mozambique Channel between Madagascar and the eastern coast of Africa, the Union of the Comoros is an archipelago made up of four islands with a total area of 2,612 km² (*according to Wikipedia*). The Union of the Comoros is one of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and also of the group of Least Developed Countries (LDCs). It has recently been classified as a middle-income country but remains a fragile state in the reconstruction and reform phase.

Given the importance that the tourism sector has for this Archipelago and the risk of importation of the virus due to numerous exchanges between countries, the Union of the Comoros took steps to develop a response to the COVID 19 pandemic even before the coronavirus arrived in the country.

Decisions and implementation of the strategy to fight the Coronavirus

On April 3, 2020, the National COVID 19 Pandemic Coordination Committee was established by Presidential Decree. The Committee was structured with sub-committees on logistics, communication, security, economy support, administrative and financial as well as scientific matters.

A national plan was developed and adopted by the Presidency of the Republic to serve as a framework and working tool for the National Committee. The plan was to reinforce the preparation capabilities, including an alert and response system to a possible outbreak with several planned scenarios. A number of initial measures were taken, including:

- The imposition of curfew from 8 pm to 5 am;
- Mosques and other places of worship were closed and Friday prayers were suspended;
- number of passengers in taxis and other public transport were reduced by half depending on the type of vehicle;
- all commercial and international flights were suspended with the exception of cargo flights;
- the University as well as other public and private educational institutions were closed.

Once the measures were implemented, a number of measures to detect early cases of infection and to slow local transmission and contain the virus were put in place. Measures were also developed for care and treatment. These included:

- strengthening awareness and training of health personnel;
- establishment of an operational response committee with an activation and coordination mechanism;
- reinforcement of surveillance in health facilities, entry points and at community level;
- activation of the two multidisciplinary operational technical coordination committees (Public Health Committee and Hospital Services Committee and laboratories), specialized and very mobile, capable of setting up an immediate response to investigate suspected cases, take samples in good and secure conditions, initiate contact monitoring if necessary, train health and support staff, supply equipment for the security of the health staff and, if necessary, initiate isolation of patients under observation or confirmed cases in compliance with good care practices;

- an epidemiological investigation is triggered by the Epidemiological Surveillance Service, in order to identify the chain of transmission and take the most appropriate control measures (prevention and isolation measures);
- home isolation measures are taken for the contact persons;
- the medical treatment of each case is organised by the health structures already identified for this purpose in conjunction with the national committee to fight the epidemic. If hospitalisation is necessary, secure transport drives the patient to the isolation and treatment site. The patient must then wear an FFP2 mask in the presence of a third party and benefit from early curative treatment.

Economic and social measures

The establishment of a Tripartite Plus Commission within the Ministry of Labour to fight COVID-19 was one of the significant decisions among many others. The main mission assigned to this Commission consisted in supporting the Government in the implementation of specific strategies and restrictive measures for a better fight against the pandemic. At the same time the Commission was to recommend the necessary support measures for dealing with the adverse effects of the restrictive measures that had been introduced.

The commission has drawn up and adopted a strategic intervention plan in which the affected companies and sectors are identified, the difficulties identified, and proposals for remedial solutions are suggested.

▪ **Trade**

- Facilitate the arrival of containers of raw materials and essential products blocked in other countries such as: Mauritius - Madagascar - China - France.
- Prioritize the landing of containers of essential products and meat products.

▪ **Tourism**

- See his invoices honored by the State
- Support by the State of half of the salaries of the employees

▪ **Services**

- Support for these companies by the State by subsidizing at least 30% of the salaries of employees, as stipulated in the Labor Code.
- Establish a system of social dialogue within companies
- Support the payment of rents

▪ **Industries**

- See his invoices honored by the State
- The state should cover half the salaries
- The state should ensure that electricity is regularly supplied to consumers
- Eliminate fixed charges in electricity bills
- Prioritize the landing of containers:
- Raw materials to enable the operation of companies operating in the industrial sector, such as water treatment and distribution.

▪ **Private education**

- Pay a monthly allowance up to 50% of salary, 25% of which could be paid in kind, during this period of crisis

▪ **Para public transport and Hospitality**

- Stop any act of dismissal
- Support up to 50% of salary for wages;

- In case of prolongation of the crisis, grant a monthly allowance of 50% of the wages to the workers, 40% of which will be paid by the State and the employer company 10%.
- After the crisis, these employees must have priority when resuming business activities
 - **Informal**
- Registration of actors at the level of the Ministry of Labor
- Grant a flat-rate allowance, part of which could be paid in kind and the other in cash
- Strengthen hygiene and sanitation in their areas of activity

Roles of trade unions

The Comoros Confederation of workers (CTC) has been an active member of the Tripartite Plus Commission established by the Ministry of Labour.

The CTC in its Declaration dated April 20, 2020 requested the Government to:

- Screen the population to ensure that there are no cases of COVI-19 in the country;
- ensure strict compliance with labour law to avoid abuse in such circumstances.
- take concrete measures to support businesses and workers, including those in the informal sector who are already victims of the barrier measures against COVID-19; The informal sector, which employs more than 60% of women and young workers, requires special attention, given that many actors in this sector live on day-to-day work.
- do everything to stop inflation and soaring prices of basic necessities;
- set up a special fund to support and assist companies and workers who are victims of measures against COVID-19.
- The CTC called on unions to unite to mitigate the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on workers.
- The CTC demanded inclusive and constructive social dialogue to develop responses that protect jobs and guarantee wages and livelihoods of vulnerable groups.
- The CTC supported protection and security provisions against the entry of the coronavirus into the country and supported the tripartite strategic plan submitted to the Minister in charge of labour.

Conclusion

Even though the country took preventive steps and was indeed one of the last countries to receive the coronavirus, the number of COVID-19 cases has risen steadily since the index case was recorded on April 30, 2020. As of May 28, confirmed cases stood at 87 with 55 recoveries and 2 deaths. The country needs to continue its mobilization effort against the COVID-19 and to strengthen the awareness and messaging about the virus to ensure that citizens can play an active role in containing the virus. On its part, the CTTC must remain consistent as a champion for the rights and interests of the workers of Comoros in the fight against COVID-19