

Government and opposition must 'respect the rule of law and human rights' in Comoros, as referendum looms: Guterres

The infringement of democratic rights and civil liberties in the Indian Ocean archipelago of the Comoros, ahead of a vote on constitutional reform, are a source of concern said [United Nations chief](#) António Guterres on Sunday.

[In a statement](#) issued by his Deputy Spokesperson in New York, the Secretary-General expressed his concern over “persisting restrictions of civil liberties and democratic rights in the run-up to the 30 July constitutional referendum in the Comoros.”

Monday’s vote on key constitutional changes proposed by President Azali Assoumani, who took office two years ago limited to a single-term in office, has been criticized by political opponents as an effort primarily to run again in 2021, according to news reports.

Under the current constitution, power rotates every five years between the three main islands of the Comoros, as a means of balancing power after years of instability. Reports say that three vice-presidencies would be scrapped if the referendum passes, consolidating presidential authority further.

In June this year, the Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union, which has been helping to stabilize the electoral process in the Comoros, called for “the broadest possible consensus” on institutional changes across the Archipelago.

On Sunday, the UN chief urged the Government of the Comoros “political parties and all other relevant stakeholders to do their utmost to respect the rule of law and human rights” and said he was “echoing the recent decision of the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government” with his call on “Comorian stakeholders to engage in a dialogue to ensure an inclusive consultation on constitutional reforms under the auspices of the African Union.”