



AFRICA/COMOROS - First Apostolic Vicar of Comoros tells Fides: "Ours is a silent but active presence"

Agenzia Fides (Agenzia Fides) - "The Catholic Church is much appreciated by the local population, almost entirely Muslim, for her charitable activities and human development," says Monsignor Charles Mahuza Yava, the first elected Apostolic Vicar of the Comoros Islands (in the Indian Ocean), who will be ordained a bishop on June 19. The ceremony will be attended by the Head of State, the Prime Minister, and other Ministers of the Union of Comoros.

On May 1, 2010, Pope Benedict XVI elevated the Apostolic Administration of Comoros (Indian Ocean) to the rank of Apostolic Vicariate, with the new name of the Comoros Islands and the same territorial configuration (see Fides 03/05/2010).

The Vicariate comprises the Union of Comoros, sovereign state made up of three islands, in addition to Mayotte, which remains tied to France.

"While in Mayotte, the secular state recognizes the religious freedom of all religions, on the Comoros Islands, Islam is the enforced state religion, which is why the Catholic Church cannot even ring the bells to announce the religious services," said Msgr. Charles Mahuza Yava. "However, we offer our witness of Christ's love for all humanity with our work of humanitarian assistance. In particular, the Catholic hospital on the island of Grand Comoros is greatly appreciated by the population, for its quality care and the service of the staff."

"Not being able to proselytize, the 6,000 Catholics in the Vicariate are made up of immigrants, mostly Malagasy, and French nationals living in Mayotte. We have a Comorian who converted to Catholicism, taking the name of Jesus. However, the choice has led him to expulsion from the family and exclusion from the inheritance," says the Apostolic Vicar of the Comoros Islands.

The missionary presence in the Comoros began around 1935, with the Jesuits, followed by Spiritans, Capuchins, and finally by the Society of the Divine Savior (Salvatorians).

"Currently, the Apostolic Vicariate is served by 5 Salvatorians (three Congolese priests, a Belgian priest, a Tanzanian brother, and a Congolese brother) and by an Indian priest of the Paris Foreign Missions (MEP). There are also the Missionaries of Charity and the Sisters of Divine Providence."

"Ours is a silent but active presence that wishes to bear witness, through concrete works, that all of humanity is loved by Christ," concludes Msgr. Charles Mahuza Yava. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides)