

Dlamini Zuma elected new AU Commission chairperson

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The Southern African Development Community (SADC) exploded with jubilation following news on Sunday night that South Africa's Home Affairs Minister Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma had won her bid to become the first woman to lead the powerful African Union Commission.



(Image: GCIS)

Dlamini Zuma, one of South Africa's longest serving cabinet ministers, managed to garner the required 60% and was named the new chairperson of the AUC, the powerful executive arm of the African Union.

Four rounds of voting and 37 votes from 51 countries in the end sealed Dlamini Zuma's position. She defeated Jean Ping of Gabon who was seeking re-election.

Everyone had already concluded that it was going to be another stalemate after news emerged from the first round indicating that Dlamini Zuma received 27 votes against Ping's 24. It was then down to the second round - which Dlamini also won by 29 votes to Ping's 22. However, in a dramatic turn of events, the third round saw the South African minister snatching an extra four votes giving her 33 in total. Ping, who at that stage had been out of the race for failing in three rounds, received 18 votes.

It was then down to the wire and in the final and last round, the voting Heads of State gave Dlamini Zuma 37 votes, effectively placing her at the helm of the AUC.

It hasn't been an easy journey for Dlamini Zuma as the election ended in a deadlock in January after the two contenders failed to garner two thirds of the votes. The deadlock forced the AU to postpone the polls to its next summit which was initially scheduled for Malawi.

Determined not to back down, SADC has spent the last six months rallying support for Dlamini Zuma, consolidating their case by pointing out that the region had not been afforded the opportunity to occupy the top position of the AUC chairperson. They also reasoned that a woman had never occupied the position and that it was a fitting time as the AU had declared it a Decade of Women.

In a statement this week, Pretoria said with its campaigning, SADC was driven by the objective of transforming the AU into an efficient and effective continental body.

At a press conference on Sunday, shortly before the election, Dlamini Zuma stressed the importance of unity within the AU. She said strengthening African unity and advancing the transformation of the continent would be among the things for which she would strive.

"I would like to make a contribution like any African citizen. I would like to make a contribution to our organisation that's what has motivated me to come back," she said.

Shortly after the vote, Dlamini Zuma was sneaked away with the rest the South African delegation that included President Jacob Zuma for a celebration. The AU is expected to make the official announcement on Monday on the last day of the summit.

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