

Chile's constitutional assembly elects new president



Maria Elisa Quinteros was elected after nine rounds of voting on Tuesday and Wednesday [Javier Torres/AFP]

Santiago de Chile, January 6 (RHC)-- The Chilean assembly tasked with drafting a new constitution in the South American nation has elected a new president. After nine rounds of voting on Tuesday and Wednesday, members of the constitutional assembly chose epidemiologist Maria Elisa Quinteros to replace the body's inaugural president, Indigenous Mapuche professor and activist Elisa Loncon.

The change was provided for in the texts of the 155-member body, which was elected last year to draft the text to replace Chile's previous Magna Carta, produced during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet.

Quinteros got the 78 votes needed to replace Loncon in the post. "We hope to lead this process wisely," the 40-year-old said. Quinteros's victory was welcomed on Wednesday by Chile's newly elected next president, Gabriel Boric.

"There are times when good and hopeful news emerges from difficult situations and I believe this is one of them," Boric wrote on Twitter. "Count on me as president to collaborate 100% with the constituent process."

The constitutional assembly has nine months, with a possible three-month extension, to draft the new constitution. It must then go to a referendum to be set up by Boric's government, which takes office on March 11.

Boric, a 35-year-old former student movement leader, was elected last month after defeating far-right candidate Jose Antonio Kast by more than 11 percentage points. He will be the nation's youngest president, and has vowed to collaborate with the constitutional assembly while respecting the body's autonomy.

Although amended during the last decades, the previous version of Chile's constitution was widely unpopular and viewed as a source of social inequality. Chilean voters in May elected dozens of progressive, independent delegates to redraft the constitution – dealing a surprise blow to conservative candidates who failed to secure a third of the seats to veto any proposals.

The new constitution is expected to usher in major changes for Chile, with environmental activists hoping it will bring new protections and Indigenous leaders saying they hope it will help establish a new relationship between their communities and the state.

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