

Beat: Travel

Former PM Gaas appointed president of Somalia; Puntland

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USPA News - Former Somali Prime Minister Abdiweli Mohamed Ali Gaas was on Wednesday chosen as the new president of the semi-autonomous Somali state of Puntland, defeating the incumbent leader by just one vote in parliament, according to official results. The first round of voting began at 9:30 a.m. local time when the 66 members of parliament cast their vote for one of the eleven candidates, but none of them managed to secure the required two-thirds majority.

It triggered a second round in which incumbent President Abdirahman Farole received 31 votes, Gaas received 18 votes, and businessman Ali Haji Warsame secured 16 votes. After Warsame was eliminated during the second round, nearly all of his supporters opted for Gaas instead, giving the former prime minister 33 votes against Farole's 32 votes. Parliament Speaker Said Hassan Shire dismissed one of the votes as "spoiled," but both sides accepted the results. "Dr. Abdiweli Mohamed Ali Gaas has been elected as the next President of Puntland for the next five years," Shire was quoted as saying by the Garowe Online news website. Farole congratulated Gaas and called on all government workers, officials, and security forces to work with the new president. "Many people doubted Puntland's election process since we tried the democratization process. Today we can all see the voting process," Farole said, according to the website. "I remind the new President that Puntland has many enemies. I remind him that Puntland should be first, then helping Somalia should be second. What belongs to us all is the people, the State and our system." Nicholas Kay, the UN's Special Representative for Somalia, also congratulated Gaas and praised members of parliament for the "smooth process" during Wednesday's election. "I also appreciate the important role of the traditional leaders. I congratulate all the people of Puntland," he said. Kay noted that, despite numerous challenges along the way, through "compromise and perseverance," the Puntland-led process has achieved its goal of selecting a new leader. The semi-autonomous has had a functioning government since the elections in 1998 and transitions of power have taken place without major incidents.

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United Press Association, Inc.
3651 Lindell Road, Suite D168
Las Vegas, NV 89103, USA
(702) 943.0321 Local
(702) 943.0233 Facsimile
info@unitedpressassociation.org
info@gna24.com
www.gna24.com