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**PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY**

**GUEST NAME: BRIGADIER GENERAL MARTHIE VISSER**

<b>SPEAKER</b>	<b>TRANSCRIPTION</b>
DR. MALKA (INTRODUCTION)	Hello, I'm Dr. Amaleya Goneos-Malka, welcome to 'Womanity – Women in unity'. The show that celebrates prominent and ordinary African women's milestone achievements in their struggles for liberation, self-emancipation, human rights, democracy, racism, socio-economic class division and gender based violence.
DR. MALKA (GUEST SYNOPSIS)	Today we're talking to Brigadier General Visser at the Department of Defence's Gender Conference under the theme, Put action behind words and reflect the belief of embracing gender mainstreaming in the Department of Defence. General, welcome to the show.
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>Thank you very much it's my pleasure and privilege.</b>
DR. MALKA	So General, one of the most common remarks that I hear when you join the Air Force is that you can be sure there will be challenges, there'll be rewards and there will be opportunities and they'll be the same whether you're male or female. With the exception of a few frontline combat roles, women have access to the same jobs, they've got access to the same pay, training and promotion as men. Do you agree with this statement?
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>Yes, I agree with that, but I would like to say that it changed a lot over the past years, I would say from the late eighties, there was a lot of progress in this regard.</b>
DR. MALKA	And can you tell us a little bit about that because as I understand in terms of the achievement of gender ratios, this morning it was remarked that there's currently 29.8% target and the ideal is to get to 30%.
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>I would like to say that in some of the functional environments where we already achieved the targets but in an environment such as air crew, pilots, navigators, flight engineers, there's obviously still a road to go to get to the desired targets.</b>
DR. MALKA	And do you have any interventions, plans of action of how you're going to achieve those goals?
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>Well, that all happens through recruitment and aviation awareness programmes where we started at school level. I'm also fortunate, if I may say to be driving the aviation awareness programmes for the Air Force, where we start at very low grade, as low as Grade 6 and we also use the air shows to promote aviation awareness and obviously your target is young learners, girls and boys.</b>
DR. MALKA	So it's a case of focusing at almost the point of market entry of aspiring and getting the youth excited about a career.

<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	Absolutely, and we also have what we call Young Falcon camps where we use school holidays and through the Department of Basic Education we identify schools and particular, learners who are focused on Maths and Science and obviously, as I said we start at the lower grade before they make their final choice of subjects to make sure that we encourage them to be good in Maths and Science to be able to enter some of the musterings in the Air Force being engineers, pilots, air traffic controllers.
DR. MALKA	And I think that that's a really important point that you make, in terms of that career progress, it's looking at what those building blocks are in order to get to your end goal.
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	That's exactly that, ja but I would like to add to this because we are speaking on gender progress in this regard and I was listening to the Minister just now in her address where I was thinking of the challenge that women have in a military environment, being playing the ideal role in most of the cases, being a mother but also being a career woman. And we have examples where mothers, we've got an example of a female pilot who's expecting the second child and obviously the Air Force is very committed to accommodate the situation of this dual role of many of our female partners.
DR. MALKA	And when you look at that dual role is it from a flexibility point of view, if you could just elaborate in terms of how a woman manages to keep going with her career, developing and progressing, but still at the same time be able to attend to and raise her family?
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	Well, I haven't been at that situation because I never had children but I'm looking at my female colleagues and they do manage, they do manage through the flexibility we have with maternity leave and that type of thing and we also even for the fathers we have also what they call, family responsibility leave so when mother goes to hospital and when the baby is born the father also have family responsibility leave to be there close to her. And the other challenge that we can also sometimes have is when husband and wife are both in the military, that becomes a challenge sometimes when you have to transfer and we have to decide who's going to be the breadwinner, you know who's career comes first so, but I think in those cases where we have a few such cases they sort it out somehow to see how we accommodate such a family because they can be in different musterings as well, the one being a pilot maybe, the other one being a logistic officer.
DR. MALKA	That is a very interesting dilemma to be in, in terms of managing career progress with two family members who are committed to themselves and to the military on direction and routes. In my research for the show, I read a statement which said, the best part about being in the Air Force is that no two days are the same. One moment you're in offices, the next you're doing exercises and operations, other exciting things that I don't think anyone in the civilian field would be able to comprehend. Can you share some of the interesting moments that have stayed with you in your life experiences during your career?
<b>GENERAL</b>	<b>I have to start where I came from school to the Air Force. I was seventeen</b>

<p><b>VISSER</b></p>	<p>years old when I joined in 1974, but first to start to say, I didn't have any family that was somewhere in the military. I in matric, my year in matric or Grade 12, I still had to decide what I want to do but I knew I didn't want to have an ordinary job, with all due respect to mentioning teaching or nursing or being a secretary. I wanted something different. And I was almost on my way to Potchefstroom University to ... don't, it's going to be a laughter now maybe but to go and do a diploma in, to become a librarian and fortunately, somehow at the time they started the college that was later called the army ... the Women's College in George. They started the college in 1971 and I heard about that at school and at some stage I got an invitation from the Air Force, an application form to say, we invite you to come for a selection, because at the time things changed and it was the first time where the National Defence Force started recruiting women for defence, that was when they started in 1971 for the first time, after World War II.</p>
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>So you were right there at the beginning of, almost the next wave, in terms of military recruitment for women.</p>
<p><b>GENERAL VISSER</b></p>	<p>I'm the last one left of a group of 33 ladies who did basic training in the Air Force, the first course presented to women after World War II and I'm the only one left because I was the youngest.</p>
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>And I read that you've had a continuous military career for 42 consecutive years.</p>
<p><b>GENERAL VISSER</b></p>	<p>That's correct, ja and as you said earlier on, not two days the same and that is what excited me about that and also the challenges that went with it because in my time, I would say even until integration in 1994 we didn't have mentors, female mentors in the Defence Force, we had some chauvinism, we had some experiences of sexual harassment and those things and we had to manage that through other channels which we did so it was quite a challenge but it's interesting to me to note, and the Minister made a note today and I realised at some stage on 9 August 1956, when we had the big march to the Union buildings, it was two months before my birth, little did I know, how, what that would mean for me, many years later.</p>
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>There's a lot of significance to that. Now as this is a gender show, issues of sexual harassment or gender concerns within the workforce are important issues for women to contend with. Can you tell us how you dealt with some of those challenges?</p>
<p><b>GENERAL VISSER</b></p>	<p>Well prior to 1994 and prior to the time when we started having, as I said we were the first senior women in the Air Force eventually. At the time in 1974 when I joined, some of the ladies who completed their military training at the College in George, joined the Air Force. So we had Lance Corporals at the time. But at the time we had to revert to our regimental Sergeant Major's wife for example, I'm talking about '76, '77. We didn't have the wonderful policies and regulations we're having today and also the channels of reporting, because we do have a call centre, where you can report such cases and we do have the policy on gender mainstreaming, gender equality, sexual misconduct in the broad, fraternisation. We have a</p>

	<b>policy on all of those issues so it really helps a lot to those ladies who are being confronted with such cases.</b>
DR. MALKA	Policies are really an enabling factor, it helps from a point of view of making sure that you can do your work the way you want to be doing it and in the correct environment.
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>Quite right, yes that's true. I had experience recently, where such cases were reported. We also had cases where at training institutions you might find instructors who would intimidate female students and, but there's also ways to handle that as I said we've got the policies and the reporting channels in place for that.</b>
DR. MALKA	We'll be right back after this.
<b>AD BREAK</b>	
DR. MALKA	General, given your long tenure within the military space, you've seen a lot of transformation take place, do you think that there are any jobs that women today are exempt from or can't do within the Air Force environment?
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>No, I'm totally convinced that the doors are open for them in the Air Force environment. I would even like to add a very recent example of the ejection seats, ejection seats for aircraft. We even have a project on the go now, where they change ejection seats in the trainer, all the aircraft to accommodate people with lighter weight. So that's why you also then have opportunity for females with a more tender build to also be accommodated in aircraft.</b>
DR. MALKA	So we're saying the issues go through, not just from a personnel point of view but also technological changes that are happening.
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>And I was thinking about when the Minister spoke earlier on when they went to the Democratic Republic of Congo and they had females that received the Oryx helicopter. Now we recently deployed our first female MAOT Commander. MAOT meaning Mobile Air Operation Team, so we deployed the first MAOT female commander in the DRC.</b>
DR. MALKA	So in terms of what the Minister was talking about today, were they your recruits then that were receiving the Oryx helicopter?
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>I'm not a hundred percent sure, but I would like to believe where there's Air Force aircraft flying, normally some of your support staff, your ground liaison officer and your MAOT team will be part of that deployment.</b>
DR. MALKA	And talking about women's careers within the Air Force space, can you tell us in terms of access to equal opportunities, access to promotion and expansion, for access to promotion in order and course training for women to expand their careers, is there equal opportunity and access?
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>Oh, yes I can see no difference there. I've also been getting a little bit back onto my own career, I've been one of the first female directing staff or instructors at the Air Force College in 1984 and also, things also changed when I did my officer forming in 1981, we also didn't have any female instructors at the time and I was listening to the Minister now to say that we can do the same as the men and we proved it there. Sometimes, you</b>

	<b>know and you don't complain about the backaches and the sore ankles and those things afterwards because you want to be proud of what you achieved, you achieved it with your male partners or male colleagues.</b>
DR. MALKA	And when you're operating in those environments and you're working through it is going through and achieving and delivering on what you've done and proving that you are an equal to male counterparts.
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>And that's why I've brought this quote along that I would like to share to the listeners that comes from a book that was based on Tutan's Principles of War and this book was written by a Taiwanese lady, Catherine Wong and what you just said now make me think of the following, "Achieving success as a woman doesn't necessarily mean beating men at their own game, women can win and be successful on their own terms using the natural abilities they already possess." So what I'm saying is women and I'm talking about my younger generation that might join the Defence Force or the Air Force is, you must take your challenges and turn it into opportunities. You should never sit back if you're determined to make the military your career and to be a soldier first then you have to follow that route. Take your challenges and turn it into opportunities and it worked for me, many a times. You want to go and sit and cry and sulk and feel sorry for yourself, but the next moment you're saying, but I want to be in the Defence Force, I want to do it for my country, so I will persevere and I will give the same output or performance than my male counterparts.</b>
DR. MALKA	And you've just reminded me, in terms of what you're saying about the perseverance, the drive, one of the questions that I ask all my guests is about the factors that they feel have contributed to their success so whether it's talking about hard work, whether it is about someone who's influenced you in your life, what would you say have been the key factors for your success thus far?
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>Well, if I must look at myself, my own I think personal self-discipline for starters for me and as I grew my career in the Defence Force or in the Air Force particularly, I just say to myself all the time, you know your opportunities is not going to stop, you must, and you must also develop yourself, you must, you know the culture of learning, if you get thrown into the deep end, into a new post, I must use myself as an example again, when I became a Intelligence Officer in 1982, it was still in the time of the Bush War and I was put at a Operational Squadron, first helicopters and then later Transport Squadron. You had to go and study your, at the time, the enemy weaponry, the enemy aircraft, you had to be prepared to brief the pilots whose going into the next deployment to see what they're going to expect there, radar systems etcetera so you have to go and study to make sure that you can have the same level of experience and knowledge about the job that you're doing.</b>
DR. MALKA	You're absolutely right and learning is a lifelong process and it seems that you are an advocate for education.
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>Absolutely. As I said I found myself for the first time, when I became the directing staff member at the Air Force College. I realised that training is</b>

	<p>so critical and also we know Madiba's famous quote on education which means it's the most powerful tool to change the world and it definitely worked for me. As I showed on my profile is, I've done several courses and the one course that I've done at UNISA, I did at a very late stage, but I said to myself, this is not the end and I was already a full Colonel, it was not so long ago, and I went and I completed part-time, part-time I completed my degree.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And one of your other interests seems to be about culture, military history and when I talk about from a culture point of view, I think that extends to diversity, how do you see your skills and aptitude for taking on elements of diversity and cultural richness being applied within your work environment?</p>
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<p><b>Okay, I want to take it back to my own career again, I call it a privilege, I was placed there because of my post and position at the time that I had the privilege to serve on the Integration Committee and the Integration Board, when we integrated all the former forces in 1994 and the Defence Force presented a programme at the time, where you had a three or four day programme, where you sit, we're sitting and you have dialogue, on the background and cultures, not just cultures on African culture and Afrikaans culture but a military background. Our colleagues at the time, our comrades who were trained in Angola and Russia and other places. What did they see as military discipline, for example, how do they see you applying military discipline for example and how did they learn it, because it was based on other doctrines. It wasn't based on South African doctrine and I was so intrigued by that and for me, it just made it clear for me that this country is a place for all of us and this Defence Force is a place for all of us and that's why I never ever thought about leaving the Defence Force after integration, it never ever crossed my mind and that's why I want to finish it in a bit more than a year from now and at the age of 60 to say that I would like to believe I left a legacy.</b></p>
DR. MALKA	<p>So in terms of next steps, this is the last few years within your career within the Force that it's about looking at your legacy on driving transformation?</p>
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<p><b>Absolutely, so yes and I also had the privilege and currently I'm also responsible for Foreign Relations, to engage other Defence Forces and Air Forces.</b></p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Can you tell us a bit more about that, the countries that are involved and take us through some of those experiences.?</p>
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<p><b>I think we've got from a Defence Force point of view, well let me speak Air Force, we've got, the world is open to us. The Minister just spoke about our members that are trained in Cuba, currently the people that's on course there. We have excellent Memorandums of Agreement on Government level but several countries which normally cascades down into Air Force to Air Force Co-operation or Defence Co-operation and for the Air Force I just see good opportunities for us, it also helps our youngsters to get exposure to how other Defence Forces or Air Forces do their training in particular areas. It could be flying, it could be Air Traffic Control, it could be Protection Services so I think it's wonderful for us and obviously, the same, we also accommodate from our other Air Forces, we</b></p>

	<b>accommodate members on Flying Training Courses and things like that.</b>
DR. MALKA	It's great that we've got those international relations in place now, that the world is a smaller place and more sharing.
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>Ja, that's true, and as I say what we also experience closer to South Africa is obviously our co-operation in the SADC, Southern African Development Community environment and also, what we also heard from the Minister this morning is, our females that are in posts, that's in deployment and they also have key roles to play in this multinational or bilateral sometimes exercises that we have within the African continent.</b>
DR. MALKA	I was quite intrigued about what the Minister said today, in terms of deployments that we have in Darfur Sudan as well as in the Democratic Republic of Congo, specifically in the Eastern sector. And looking at today's conference, which if I get the theme again it is, Putting action behind words and reflecting the belief of embracing gender mainstreaming in the Department. What for you would be the expected outcomes of the conference today?
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>I think transformation in this case, gender transformation, it remains a journey. You can never have the end say to say that we've got the perfect situation now so as change comes along, as opportunities comes along, as I make examples now of external deployments and so on, obviously the policies and the approaches are being adapted to accommodate more women. I would also like to add something when you speak about deployments, from reporting that we got, is the help and the assistance that female soldiers give in a place like the DRC and Darfur to women and children of the local communities because sometimes if they are put under pressure with the sexual harassment or you know by rebels or so on, they speak easily woman to woman, which didn't happen with male soldiers.</b>
DR. MALKA	One of the things that I heard which I think is fairly horrific is how rape is used as a weapon in war.
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>That's definitely so and that's where our female soldiers come in very well, I think is to fill that gap, where women, as I said they feel more free and open to speak about the incidents or the things that happened to them.</b>
DR. MALKA	So in terms of the role that women play, it's not just about the functional role in their work environment but it's also filling in on the social element on the softer side.
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>Absolutely so and I think our Minister alluded to that as well, you can never take that away because we were created like that, to be a male and a female. But in the military, I do believe that 42 years down the line, I do believe that we are achieving great successes in terms of having a unified Defence Force equally served by males and females.</b>
DR. MALKA	And General, looking at gender equality from a more broader perspective, not necessarily within the military space, we spoke earlier about legislation that has been put in place to empower women, to help guide them through their work environments, but increasingly gender equality is a global focus, from a South African point of view we've developed our Women Empowerment and

	Gender Equality Bill, which is currently under review but its principal aim is about equal opportunity, equal representation, equal pay for the same job. What are your perspectives on gender equality and do you think that fifty-fifty representation is achievable?
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>I think it is but we must also be realistic in certain areas. I attended the conference last year as well, the Minister alluded to training in the Special Forces today. There were challenges, particularly from a physical point of view, because there are some things, I mean the body of a woman might not be able to pick up 200 kilograms of ammunition or a missile or something, whereas the male partner can do that but that's why we do practical leadership in our training courses as well. I do believe that is where you ... because obviously, it's built on teamwork and it's built on group leadership, where obviously there will be roles that's more important or that's more applicable to the female and other cases more for the males, so at the end of the day it is teamwork. If you get into an operational situation, I do believe it becomes teamwork at the end of the day.</b>
DR. MALKA	Can you tell us a bit more about the dynamics and with the hierarchy, for instance, I've learnt today that we've got several different ranks, that it's a very hierarchical institution, within the military, but yet at the same time there's elements of group leadership?
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>Ja, that is true, as I said and that is where this quote that I read to you now, comes to play is that, "We're different but we're not really different in the military".</b>
DR. MALKA	And it reminds me, I had an interview with the National Commissioner of Police, Riah Phiyega and she said, exactly what the quote ... that women and men are different, we've got different polarities ... She said, "I don't want to be a second rate man, I want to be a first rate woman".
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>Absolutely, that is why I say in your own right, you must exceed and prove yourself as an individual.</b>
DR. MALKA	We'll be right back after this.
<b>AD BREAK</b>	
DR. MALKA	Now moving forwards in terms of progressing and you've had your vast experience, which areas do you think that we need to build on the most to benefit women in the future?
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>I think obviously in the operational environment, because women are many at times seen to be in the support role, you know to be a Technical Officer at the base, to be a Logistics Officer, Human Resources Officer but there's still a way to go in some areas, to see that the female fighter pilot or the female Elephant tank driver can do the same job as the male partner so I think we're getting there but as I said earlier on it remains a journey all the time.</b>
DR. MALKA	And General, you have provided clear evidence today that you are a role model

	for women and when you started in your career there were no female role models. Can you tell us today, what advice would you give to girls who want to follow a career in your footsteps?
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>I think the first thing that I always tell all youngsters, having said that I'm involved in aviation awareness programmes, is first you must be prepared to be a soldier, you must be prepared to be a soldier, the physical demands it takes from you, the military discipline and the self-discipline it takes from you, first and foremost, you must be prepared to be a soldier, otherwise you won't survive in this organisation and you will not be having a fulfilling career.</b>
DR. MALKA	And in terms of looking at as you say of having a fulfilling career, you mentioned earlier that some of the criteria for learnerships in coming through with their education focus on Maths, focus on Science, can you tell us what are some of the other elements that would be required for someone wanting to pursue a career, so what are those building blocks?
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>I think the one important thing that are being part of criteria for selection or for a career in the Defence Force in the broad Defence Force is you must be medically fit. So and, even if you want to become a member of the air crew and that includes, Air Traffic Controllers as well. Eyesight and those things are critical so you have to pass that and also the psychological test that they go through, the air crew particularly, they have to pass those tests that's being presented by the Military Psychological Institute.</b>
DR. MALKA	General, do you consider that there are opportunities available within the military different to those that are offered by the civilian?
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>Oh, definitely so, as I say I have a lot of family and friends that's working in the private sector and also in other government departments. But I want first to say that we must know, earlier on when I said first be a soldier is the military is different. The Department of Defence is different to other departments. It's just a unique ... a unique working environment but the opportunities that crosses your way, it is just immense. I had opportunities to go on foreign visits. I had opportunities to be an accompanying Officer for foreign visitors, so many other opportunities ... I had to meet other prominent people and to be in work sessions with them, to be in conferences with them, but that's all from your own career and the posts that you filled at that moment in time, that you ended up in this cases. But sometimes you have to also volunteer, you know when you see opportunities, say to your General in charge, or your Officer Commander in Charge, I would like to do that or I would like to do that for you or I would like to take that opportunity and many a times it worked. So what I want to get back to again, seek your own opportunities for development and growth.</b>
DR. MALKA	So looking back, would you do it all over again if you had the choice of reliving your life?
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>Without any doubt, if I have to choose a career again, it will be the Air Force again.</b>

DR. MALKA	And now, General turning to some of your personal achievements or experiences, one of the things that I read was that you served on the Planning Committee of Madiba's funeral and the subsequent attendance at the funeral in Qunu, can you share with us a little bit about that?
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>I think to start off, I think anybody that had a privilege of meeting Madiba, knowing the legacy that he left this country, the lessons of wisdom that he left for us, is that I had the privilege of meeting him in 1995 when Polokwane was still called Pietersburg and we had the first Freedom Day celebrations and I was in charge of the team who was responsible for the decor of a aircraft hanger. We had to make that hanger look like a concert hall, you know almost like a concert hall, carpets the whole thing. So many years after that, that was the first time that I met him, I had a few words with him and when we started the planning for his funeral, obviously we were a very big integrated team because there's a lot of aspects to take care of but the most unexpected thing that came upon my career that I will never forget, I will always cherish that is on the morning of the funeral I was on duty at Air Force Base Waterkloof and to cut a long story short, Reverend Jesse Jackson was at the airport, there was some misunderstanding with his flight booking to Umtata and I accompanied Reverend Jackson to Umtata so I had the wonderful opportunity to be in Qunu for the funeral and to meet Reverend Jesse Jackson, the one and only Reverend Jackson. So it was a privilege for me to be at the funeral and to experience that whole procedure in Qunu, I will forever cherish that and I will forever cherish the medal that I received for the work that we've done there.</b>
DR. MALKA	I think those, as you said, those are memories that cannot be replaced and they will be cherished. Now, General we're coming to the end of our show, can I ask you in closing, if you could please share a few words of inspiration to pass out to our young ladies and girls listening on the continent.
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>I think if I must do it in broad, not just Defence Force, I must say there is a place for everyone on this earth and there's a role to play for everyone whether you choose the military, whether you choose an academic role or anything out in business, for me, once again as I said, earlier on in the quotation that I used, we're not competing, we are not as females competing with men, we want to achieve our goals in life, whether it's career, whether it's personal life, you want to achieve it from your own abilities, and I want to make another example, long time ago I applied for an attaché post and one of the females on the Selection Board, a female Colonel asked me, would you like to be selected today, based on your gender or based on your competency. I said, definitely not on my gender. I would like to be seen to be competent and to have the right profile to become an attaché. That was my answer, so as I said as a woman you can have your own achievements in your career and you can run shoulder to shoulder with your male counterparts.</b>
DR. MALKA	I think those are very powerful motivating words. Thank you very much for joining us today.

<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>I thank you.</b>
DR. MALKA	And we look forward to hearing about the last elements in terms of the latter part of your career with the legacy you leave behind on driving transformation within the Defence Force.
<b>GENERAL VISSER</b>	<b>Thank you very much.</b>
<b>END PROGRAM</b>	