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PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: AMBASSADOR MARTHA CECILIA PINILLA-PERDOMO

SPEAKER	TRANSCRIPTION
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)	Joining us today is Ambassador Martha Cecilia Pinilla-Perdomo who is the Ambassador of the Republic of Colombia to South Africa and also the Non-resident Ambassador of Colombia to Botswana and Namibia. Welcome to the show, Ambassador.
<b>AMBASSADOR PINILLA- PERDOMO</b>	<b>Thank you very much Dr. Amaleya, it is really an honour and a pleasure for me to be here with all of you.</b>
DR. MALKA	Ambassador, you are Ambassador to the Republic of Colombia to both South Africa, you're also Non-resident Ambassador of Colombia to Botswana as well as Namibia. Can you share with us some of the work that you do as an Ambassador in the Southern Hemisphere in Africa?
<b>AMBASSADOR PINILLA- PERDOMO</b>	<b>Well, in this specific case between Colombia and South Africa as well as in the case with Botswana and Namibia usually in Southern Africa Colombia is not well-known. So here I have many challenges. First of all to let to know all of you what is Colombia about. And it is a very tough process because we have been far away, especially by the Atlantic sea. And because we still don't have direct connections between our countries. So for people to really get to know what Colombia is one of my main purposes here in South Africa and in Southern Africa. In that regard so I have to work a lot of projects on cultural issues and we have done it very, very successfully. So thank you for inviting me for people to know first of all that Colombia is located in South America, that Colombia has celebrated its two hundred and fifth anniversary of its independence from Spain, and that Colombia is a growing economy with a diversity in all fields, we are the result of a very interesting mixture. First, the clever indigenous people, second the Spanish who came five hundred years ago and they brought us many beautiful things, like for example our language is Spanish, it's a very nice language, it's a very romantic language by the way. And the Africans who came later on and Colombia we always say is one of the happiest countries in the world and part of it is because of the music, the drums that the African people brought to Colombia, so we are a vibrant mixture of peoples.</b>
DR. MALKA	I want to say it's a very rich heritage and lots of cultural elements, so those are strong influences that I'm sure when you're in programmes such as these it's about articulating those elements and also on your side the political relations

	and the economic relations from a business point of view to increase productivity and bilateral.
<b>AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO</b>	<b>Yes, yes. So to know each other is very very important to be able to fulfil all the objectives, as you say political consultations between our countries is very very important so I'm very happy that in March 9<sup>th</sup> this year, as Minister of Foreign Affairs of South Africa had a very important meeting with my Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs in Colombia. He went with a quite big delegation to Bogota and we signed the memorandum of understanding for political consultations. So the first meeting after signing this understanding will be in Pretoria in May 2016 and our Vice-Minister will come with businessmen to improve the trade between our two countries. So political issues and economic issues are very important in our relations.</b>
DR. MALKA	And considering how our globe is diverse as it is, it is all interconnected.
<b>AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO</b>	<b>Yes, yes globalisation brings its challenge but of course brings a lot of opportunities. And Colombia looks it more like opportunities to really to embrace the world. We're a very open country, we have very good relations with the majority of the countries in the world and we are very happy that foreigners come to our country. So we are working very hard to enhance the bilateral doings between South Africa and Colombia because it also helps very much for the people to know each other, to really know how we are, and as I say Colombian people is one of the happiest in the world. We love music, when you go to Colombia you dance all night, you have so much fun and we Colombians love foreigners to come to visit our country.</b>
DR. MALKA	I look forward to planning a trip.
<b>AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO</b>	<b>I'm so glad to listen to that.</b>
DR. MALKA	Ambassador, in terms of your position in South Africa, are there any specific milestones that you want to achieve?
<b>AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO</b>	<b>Yes. When I was asked to come to South Africa by my Minister of Foreign Affairs I started really to study what had happened between our two countries. And the first thing that really moved me was to help to have a South African Embassy in Colombia. And I cannot tell you exactly when it is going to be open but I can tell you that South African Government, you people, you South Africans are going to have an Embassy in Bogota very soon. So for me this is really a milestone. After signing this memorandum of understanding in political consultations the opening of the Embassy of South Africa in Bogota is really an historic issue.</b>
DR. MALKA	And obviously that will pave the way to improve relations between the countries by having your platform here with the Colombian Embassy and the South African Embassy as its counterpart.
<b>AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO</b>	<b>Yes, definitely. Definitely, it is very important to really strengthen the relations between two countries it's very important to have embassies in the capital cities. Because also they are going to be able to report directly to their government how the country is doing and I'm so glad that South</b>

	<b>African Government is recognising how well Colombia is doing.</b>
DR. MALKA	And given your experience, you've served in diverse territories, so from North America, Pacific Asia, Latin America, the Andean region and now you're in Southern Africa. How does South Africa compare to some of the other countries that you've had the opportunity to serve in?
<b>AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO</b>	<b>Well, first of all I have to say that each country is unique. One of the things that move me to become a diplomat since I was young that I really wanted to know the world. For me it was very important and Colombia has beautiful mountains, high ones what they call the Andes mountains. So I usually look by the window, I looked at the mountains and say, come on, what is behind those mountains. And I think deep inside myself, you know that moved me a lot to become later, a diplomat and I am always amazed by the diversity of every country but at the end what I have found is that all human beings, we are all the same. It doesn't matter the colour of our skin, what language do we speak, which religion we are in or what religion beliefs but at the end every person in the world wants the same, every person in the world wants to be happy, wants to develop themselves and people want to be able to bring up their children in the best possible way so culture is something amazing, that drives me in an incredible way but at the end we're all the same. We want exactly the same things that's my conclusion after twenty-five years in the Foreign Service.</b>
DR. MALKA	And you have been in the Foreign Service for a very long time and you've received numerous medals of honour and awards. Can you take us through some of the landmarks in your career so far?
<b>AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO</b>	<b>Well there are so many different and very interesting moments. But I will say in my first position as Consul in New York was very important for me and I always remember it, because I was like 26 years old when I was sent to New York. We had to help a lot the Colombians because it is not easy when people go to another country they face so many challenges. I will always remember it with my heart. So for me was a great experience it also showed me a lot how migrants had to work very hard and how we have to support them in their dream.</b>
DR. MALKA	I think what you're saying as well, it's not just the, often we look very objectively at relations, so whether it is political relation, it's a business relation but this is going in behind the scenes, really looking at the individuals that matter and people matter.
<b>AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO</b>	<b>Yes, yes, that's true because I really believe that relations between countries are exactly the same as relations between people, you know and at the end you see a country move through people so institutions are very important but we cannot forget that institutions are handled by human beings. That's something I also discovered from my career and that I think has been very important in the achievements I have in my career because I understood in a very early stage that you're always at the end with other human beings and every negotiation we do between a country and alone in the end it's the people who is going to be benefitted with this agreement and understanding.</b>
DR. MALKA	Yes, people make the world go around. We'll take a short break.
<b>AD BREAK</b>	

DR. MALKA	One of the comments, Ambassador that you mentioned in our last segment was the relations between countries are exactly like the relations between people and that in order for things to progress, we really have to take in the people factor into account. Can you take us through some of the moments when you realised that having a diplomatic career was a big part of your destiny?
AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO	<b>Well, it started in an indirect way when I was a child but as I said before I looked into the window and I looked into the mountains and I was always asking myself, what is behind those mountains. Then when I grew up I decided to become a journalist and I studied Social Communication and Journalism in Bogota and I wanted to cover political affairs, internal political affairs but also foreign affairs, so I decided when I was finishing my studies I decide to specialize myself on political issues, I mean and international issues and I came to do this specialisation and I found a wonderful work in the international field. So I decide to follow the diplomatic career and then I joined the Minister of Foreign Affairs through the Diplomatic Academy and it was hard to say that I moved into this new area but it was like a call, you know. It was ...</b>
DR. MALKA	I think it's very different when one element from a journalistic point of view is reporting on the issues ...
AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO	<b>Yes.</b>
DR. MALKA	Compared to actually being involved and making those issues.
AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO	<b>Yes. I found international affairs, to be so fascinating that I didn't want to cover them. I wanted to live them so there are those moments in life where you have to decide one way or the other way and I decided and I'm very happy. I'm very happy I decided, because I really believe that you know any community has conflicts. You have conflicts in your family, you have conflicts in your neighbourhood but the only real way to resolve conflicts is through dialogue and I really believe in that, so because I believe in that, I love what I do.</b>
DR. MALKA	And Ambassador, because we're a gender based show, one of the things that we fundamentally look at is building female leadership capacity and I consider that it's vitally important to the future of women, not just in Africa but across the world. Now as a woman who has constantly worked hard to succeed, how do you see female leadership?
AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO	<b>Well, I believe from my heart that we need more women leading in the world and it's for one specific reason, I think men are wonderful, but they are sometimes or usually, as we say, too rational, usually for a man one plus one is equal to two. For us women, it will be three, four or five. And we work, of course we have to be very rational in our decisions but you also have to be very sensitive and we have something that we women develop easier than men and it's our intuition. So many times, I cannot explain why I decide to take one way, but something inside tells me, this is the way you are going to sort this situation. We have this intuition and this sensitivity that allow us to go more inside the feelings of the others. I also believe because nature has given it to us because of our motherhood role so we have to listen; children, a woman can have five children and she</b>

	<p>needs to know, in a very wisdom way how to resolve a conflict between two children and if you don't have enough money how you are going to divide what you have with the five of them. So I think we have in our DNA, something that tells us how to solve situations between brothers and sisters. And we are more open to find alternative solutions, to be creative. We are so creative and I see sometimes when I am with my male colleagues, other Ambassadors and the way they see a problem sometimes is quite different, the way I see them, you know and I'm happy we are different. I mean I think the world is marvellous, the diversity makes this world wonderful. But then we need more of that women perspective, for example in Parliaments.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Yes, from a Parliament point of view that's the next thing that I wanted to ask you that South America as a continent has got more female Presidents than any other continent.</p>
AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO	<p>Yes.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Why do you think that is?</p>
AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO	<p>Well, I really believe that the American continent as a whole was the continent of the hub so all the people that came from Europe to America they were dreaming of a new world, that's why America's continent is called the new world because it was really what was belief and we had become more liberance and we have become more tolerance, we have become more open, because I think we carry that legacy of the dream of building a really new world that's why I believe and I'm not saying we still have so many challenges, but in Colombia I can assure you, that women have become a very important part of the economic society, economic community, political community. In the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I would say now we are more women than men and we still have so many challenges, but Colombia, we have done a lot. In the banking system there are a lot of women working. There are so many areas. Some areas is still need more women, especially I will say, clearly we need more women in our congress and why I emphasize this because in the Parliaments, in the Congress is where the laws are made.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Yes, and the legislation then dictates what happens and infiltrates into the country.</p>
AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO	<p>Yes. And we need more female perspective in the process of building a new or doing a new law.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And how do you think we can encourage more of that to have a stronger influx of women into the Congress?</p>
AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO	<p>Well I think, it has to be, first of all with more education, I think it depends of any change in any area is education. Colombia is a quite good educated country, and as you may know, General Simon Bolivar who was born in Caracas, Venezuela and later on he passed away in Santa Marta, Colombia. He got independence for Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Panama. Our independence from the Spanish Crown and he used to say, in the 19th century, that Colombia was like a university, you</p>

	<b>know and I think it is very important in our process and now for example, the President of Colombia has a very important slogan for his second administration, which is Peace, education and equity. So as you see, education continues to be a basic stone in our policies, so I insist, education is the most important thing.</b>
DR. MALKA	But with education I also consider that sometimes we need a re-education and in terms of the way that culture and tradition often dictate how our life is moving forwards that sometimes there's aspects of culture need to change in order to open those opportunities and allow people to think in different ways. What's your view on that?
<b>AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO</b>	<b>Ja, that's a very interesting issue, because of course, I mean we have to remember our past. Somebody who knows the past is able to build the future, but when you remember your past, you have also to be very critic of it, there are very good things in the past and there are other things that are not good of your past, so those kind of values or customs even, you have to respect them, looking into your past. You have to really not reproduce them, when they put another human being in a less condition, something any value or any cultural aspect that undermines women regarding men, are clearly not good.</b>
DR. MALKA	And they can't be used as excuses.
<b>AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO</b>	<b>Exactly, exactly, so I really encourage all women in the world to never wait, if there is any cultural aspect that undermines yourself, you cannot, you cannot I say.</b>
DR. MALKA	And Ambassador, you've gone through some of your career history and the different elements and the environments that you've experienced from a cultural point of view and change but in terms of your role, you in effect have become a role model to many women based on all of your achievements, providing evidence that with hard work and personal sacrifice everything can be achieved. Can you share with us some of the gender challenges that you've experienced and how you've overcome them in your career?
<b>AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO</b>	<b>I think that the most important challenge for me has been a very soft and kind woman, because usually people see as a sign of weakness, no or people believe that a woman has to behave like a man to be respected as an equal or a competent official. So I was also very clear in this since I started in my diplomatic career, that I, my personality will remain, that I couldn't lose myself into my professional life and I consider myself being very feminine, soft and kind but I also am very clear in my roles and I how I want to get them and as my grandmother taught me since I was a child, I think it was the first diplomatic lesson I got in life. My grandmother always said to me, it's not what you say, it's how you say it. She always encouraged me to be very kind in my relations. And I believe that when you, it's also my presence, that you don't need to scream to be listened, you know. But I really believe, and sometimes people consider myself to be so naive, because of my beliefs and the way I behave and so on. And I can tell you I'm not naive at all and I really believe I have been able to accomplish the tasks that I have been instructed.</b>
DR. MALKA	Yes, and delivered through competence through your experience, through your knowledge. If anyone wants to follow in your footsteps, so for a young girl wanting to start out in her career, what advice would you give her, given what

	you know now?
<b>AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO</b>	<b>First of all, you have to believe in your dreams, you know. When you believe, and in your values and your beliefs, because at the end you're always alone with yourself. So you have always to listen inside yourself, what do you really believe on, what do you want to do and it will help you to understand, you have to see the goal, if you have clear your goals, it will make easier your part. Because if you don't have clear your goals the life is tough. There are so many challenges in personal life, in professional life so you need to have clear what do you want to get in the future in your personal life and your professional life to be able not to lose in the way.</b>
DR. MALKA	So it's setting a strategy and not being distracted by all of the events that take place.
<b>AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO</b>	<b>Yes and it means to being persistent. You don't get things from one day to the other. If you really want to move you have to stand that's why I'm saying nobody can take this from you. You can lose your money but what you learnt, no-one can take it from you.</b>
DR. MALKA	It's being self-disciplined.
<b>AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO</b>	<b>Yes.</b>
DR. MALKA	Having those values and almost living, as you mentioned earlier, the President's words of, Peace education and equity as pillars of Colombian society.
<b>AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO</b>	<b>Yes.</b>
<b>AD BREAK</b>	
DR. MALKA	And if you've just joined us, in our previous segment, Ambassador was talking about building female leadership capacity, from the South American perspective, the work that is happening within Colombia and the need to try to encourage more women to come into the Congress, because ultimately as we have more women, having a female perspective that gives weight in terms of how much legislation and policy has developed to having a ripple effect into the rest of the country and the state of affairs on women. Ambassador, we're coming into the last end of our segment here and one of the questions, that I ask all my guests on this programme who have made significant achievements in their own disciplines and respective fields is about the factors that they have felt have contributed to the their success. So if you could please share with us what have been those driving factors?
<b>AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO</b>	<b>Definitely, my father and my mother. My father was a very hard working person and his example was for me very very important, his commitment to his job, his honesty and also how he allowed us in at home, my sister and me to think by ourselves. And my mother she was at home she didn't work, because she didn't like to work. I will believe that I was very lucky to have a father that allowed my mother to work but she decided not to work and that's okay, of course as well. I mean it's not that all women have to work, all men have to work, no it has to be a free decision. So ...</b>

DR. MALKA	So I think that with a relationship it's about partnership and choices on how you were running your family and your household and what you're saying, it's giving the choice.
AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO	<b>Exactly. And you know in those times in Colombia it was not usual that a woman would work, my father say, if you want to work, you can work, my mother say, no I don't want to. And he said okay, then you don't work. I mean, that will show you how I was educated.</b>
DR. MALKA	Very progressive at that time.
AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO	<b>Yes, very progressive at that time and my mother was a very romantic woman. She loved poetry and I would say she was the first one to introduce me to books. She didn't read my sister and I, Cinderella or those beautiful books for children which I respect a lot but she read us poetry and she loved music and she loved dancing so she taught us to dance and diverse kinds of music and so on. So that sincerity, sincereness of my mother was very important on who I am.</b>
DR. MALKA	So we have parents, we have your dad's values, commitments to hard work and your mom's influence from a cultural nurturing point of view into exposing you to other elements within life. Now Ambassador in closing the discussion, could you please use this platform to send a message of hope to all women in Africa who, due to circumstances, gender equality might not be their first priority but rather the daily struggle of taking care of their family, making sure there's enough food on their table and looking after their children is a more pressurizing reality.
AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO	<b>Yes, I know, I know it is not easy, but we women have the main responsibility because precisely for that because usually are women who, we raise and we carry our children in our hearts is to change those values or attitudes or behaviours towards children. So we have the responsibility when we raise a girl and when we raise a boy, we can raise a different man for the future. It is really in our hearts so we cannot feel ourselves as victims, not to feel as victims it's not a good and healthy feeling. As I said before sometimes things bring us difficulties but we can see the opportunity and having this role in the moment is the opportunity to change the life of our future men and women and the relation in the future and the role in our societies, so women have a key role in this changing processes from their home.</b>
DR. MALKA	I think you've highlighted an incredible responsibility there that is possibly underestimated by some people, in terms of creating those next generations - our future and it all comes through nurturing by mothers in terms of how they're grooming their children. So thank you for sharing those wise words.
AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO	<b>My pleasure.</b>
DR. MALKA	It's been wonderful having you on the show. Thank you very much for joining us today.
AMBASSADOR PINILLA-PERDOMO	<b>Thank you for inviting me, it has been really a pleasure to be able to share my feelings, my beliefs to all women that usually are with you in this beautiful programme.</b>

DR. MALKA	Thanks, Ambassador.
<b>END PROGRAM</b>	