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GUEST NAME: AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS

SPEAKER	TRANSCRIPTION
DR. MALKA	Joining us in studio today is the Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to South Africa, Ms Marisa Gerards, who not only looks after the South African Countess but also looks after Namibia, Botswana, Swaziland and Lesotho. That's an enormous portfolio. Welcome to the show Ambassador.
AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS	Thank you so much. Very happy to be here.
DR. MALKA	Now going straight into the conversation, you are the Ambassador to the Kingdom of the Netherlands to South Africa as well as Namibia, Botswana, Swaziland and Lesotho. Can you share with us some of the work in your capacitor as an Ambassador servicing the southern hemisphere?
AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS	Yes, my um, my assignment is to, to represent the Netherlands in these five countries and to strengthen the relations between the Netherlands and these five countries. Um, we do that in different ways. I mean we have uh, economic uh corporations, political corporations, culture corporations and also cons, consular affairs. We, we assist Dutch citizens when they get into trouble in this country or when they need a new passport.
DR. MALKA	I hope that's not too often.
AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS	Mmm, it's not too often, that's true. I mean we, we have quite some uh Dutch passport holders in this country, so they come to renew their passport but not so many tourists who get into trouble.
DR. MALKA	It's quite interesting that the, the Dutch link within the South Africans context um, and how does, how do you feel that comes through in the work that you do?
AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS	Well it adds something special to it I think. Uh, because of this historic link um, it's easy for me to understand Afrikaans. They can understand my language as well. Um that, so there's this historic link uh from way back when, but there's also very important link through the anti-apartate struggle because there was a very, very active uh anti-apartate movement in the Netherlands. So I meet lots of people who spend quite some time in the Netherlands in the seventies and the eighties going to the different conferences, the Molibongwe, the Kaza Conference that was, that was organised by the Anti-apartate Movement, but also people who studied in the Netherlands in those days or who, who went into exile. So I have these two historical links with this country that makes it uh, that makes it extra special to be here.
DR. MALKA	It gives you multiple contexts and with the, the Netherlands I found that there's quite a lot of links from an educational point of view with South African academic institutions having sister or brother partnership with counter parts.
AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS	Yeah, that's true. That's true, there's a historic link with, between the different institutes, but also when the new South Africa started in 94,

<p>- MARISA GERARDS</p>	<p>there was a huge development corporation programme between the Netherlands and uh and South Africa and education was very much part of that. Um, this programme has been concluded in 2014. We still have trans, trans, transition funds, as we call it, to go from aid to trade because South Africa's now middle income country so that also means that we're, that the relation between our two countries is a little bit redefined but there's strong ties between the institutes, they still there and um very soon we will get ten professors from the Vry Universitate in Amsterdam visiting uh, this country and going to the different universities, also visiting the embassy, presenting a lecture there uh, in memoration of Steven Ellis. He was uh an important professor in the Netherlands writing books on South Africa and he passed away recently and du so ya we, we still have these, these, these strong bonds between, between the institutes, that's absolutely true. And, and I think for me as an Ambassador, it very important, I mean I represent the Netherlands here but I'm here to connect to the five countries and I think it's only possible to, to do something mean, meaningful if it benefits both sides. So if there's a true win, win and I feel that's very much my, my position to, to explain the Netherlands to the countries here and to explain what's happening in these countries to the Netherlands and, and look for, for, for good solutions for both.</p>
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>So you functioning as, as a bridging of communications with those economic and business relations</p>
<p>AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS - MARISA GERARDS</p>	<p>Yeah, yeah, yeah, because you start really loving the country that you're, that you're based to, so that's, that's really important and we call it co-create because we think that the only way to make uh, uh meaningful relation with uh another country is to go through co-create. To not tell others what our solutions are to, to certain challenges but to look at the challenges and to see if certain ideas or innovations, how you can actual adapt them to make them work also here in South Africa.</p>
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>That's a great construct.</p>
<p>AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS - MARISA GERARDS</p>	<p>That's good because you know, right when I started here people were telling me, they said well you know so much about water. I mean the Netherlands, I mean we've been fighting against water since the beginning because more than half the countries below sea level but they said to me, they said, you're a small country densely populated and you have too much water and South Africa is a huge country with very, you know you have areas where not many people live and we have not enough water so how can your solutions work for our country. And so I think it's very important to see what are the challenges and how can we adapt our innovations and our ideas to, to meet these challenges. So that's what we try to do through this co-create uh motto.</p>
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>Well I'm sure there's some very exciting developments in that cross pollination and that leads me onto my next question. Are there any specific mile stones that you want to achieve during your tenure in, in this a, in your capacity as Ambassador serving these nations?</p>
<p>AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS - MARISA GERARDS</p>	<p>I'm very ambitious. I'm very ambitious because I've only four years so that's not so much and so right when I started my term here in October our Prime Minister was very interested in visiting uh this country. Um so I worked hard on, on trying to get a date for the Prime Minister to visit. And this will happen on November, 17 and 18 November. He will be the guest of President Zuma, will bring a large trade's mission, uh, eighty companies and four sectors, the Minister of Agriculture will come as well.</p>

	<p>So that will be an important mile stone and I tried to make it something that will last longer by trying to see if we can draw up certain memorandum of understanding on areas of mutual benefit, like science and technology, like agriculture, like migration and also have a political consultation mechanism between our two countries. So that we will meet on a regular basis and look for results you know and, and, and you know get it to the next level um and to make it even more meaningful we decided to organise, as we call it, a house of the future, which is a five day festival ???? Hall in Johannesburg, but we want to connect um, in the different sectors, so we have water, agriculture, transport and health to see how we can connect the companies also to the people here in South Africa and have it more in a kind of co-create sessions like around tables, around challenges, workshops, tedex talks uh also include young entrepreneurs start-ups and make it really something for the Dutch as well as the South Africans. So let's see how that works out. It's a little bit of experiment, I must say. We had a very nice reference group yesterday who helped us, people from, from the South African side because I felt that I need that input. Are we on the right track? Are these the right topics? Are we inviting the right people? How should we get you know, the right audience. I, I, ask please lead me because please lead me because I can make mistakes otherwise.</p>
DR. MALKA	It sounds incredibly exciting.
AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS	It will be good I think. I'm looking forward
DR. MALKA	And looking from a point of view of sustainability but also about adaptation because as you mentioned earlier when we were talking for instance, about the universities that going from 1994 to 2014 that was one component but looking at how the countries have changed, how South Africa become a middle, middle income earning economy, that we have to then move forwards and change with the times.
AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS	Yeah and I think it's also interesting for us because you know we, we, struggle with the main, with the same issues mainly. I mean migration, education, entrepreneurship, how to make your economy work. These are issues that are also very topical in the Netherlands. So I think also for us it will be very beneficial to take part in this kind of discussions. So we thinking, for example, how to in future to have a discussion on education and entrepreneurship. Should we prepare our young academics more to the business; you know business values entrepreneurship, these kind of issues. It's very topical in the Netherlands and also here, I noticed.
DR. MALKA	Yes it is.
AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS	Talking to vice chancellors of different universities, so let's see if we can have some meaningful discussion on that.
DR. MALKA	I look forward to hearing more about it as it develops and to be able to share it with our listeners.
AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS	Yeah, because also on women entrepreneurship, we'll organise something important

<p>– MARISA GERARDS</p>	
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>We definitely need to stay in touch and go through with those developments. Now on a personal level you've served your country for almost twenty years in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and have held various positions. Can you take us through, I suppose, the momentous land marks or moments that were very poignant to you and when you realised that serving your country was going to be part of your destiny.</p>
<p>AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS</p>	<p>Well, I think I, I applied for, for the diplomatic service because I couldn't choose, I thought there were so many good and interesting things to do in the world that I thought a diplomatic career would get me the opportunity to live multiple lives in one life, because if you are the Cultural Councillor in, in, in Paris you do totally different work than when you are doing trade in Vietnam, or development corporation in, in, I don't know, in Central African Republic, I mean your life will be totally different. And every four years you get a different position. So as I couldn't choose I thought that well this will be the solution because I'm inter., interested in everything, so what every comes on my path I will just grab it and, and, and see what it is and learn from it. So that was how it started and, and it yar it gave me so much you know. It's, it's, um and also that, that was very much my, my advice to all women, uh you know, take the opportunity as it comes. Um.</p>
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>And I think so often we are either through personal circumstances, that we almost box ourselves into identify with one element and not being as multi-dimensional as we truly are because the reality is that we wear so many different hats simultaneously, I think your, your solutions was a very good one.</p>
<p>AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS</p>	<p>Yar, and it's great and I mean and I did such wonderful things and it's also such a creative job, and I was a very young diplomat. I remember I was sent to my first post in Brazil and I had a wonderful Ambassador who had great faith in me and we had a visit of our crown, crown prince, coming for the first time on an official visit to another country and we wanted to do something cultural in the north east of the country and he just sent there and said well, just go there for two days, scoping mission, come back with a good idea, and then through the taxi driver, who had a friend who was a famous singer, whom I ended up with having a coffee, he proposed and said let's make a carnival for your crown prince off season. He said in Olina, which is very nice and historical I organise this wonderful carnival for him and, and let's see if that will work out. I went back and I thought it's bit, bit of a crazy idea but the Vice President happens to know this singer and he secured everything and, and so it happened you know and I can just remember this, this moment when the carnival started and the crown prince was there and I thought well this is just a great job cause it's fun and creative. But I also have lots of, of mm, examples where you really felt that you could make a difference that you could influence. When I was in Brazil the Minister of Development Corporation asked me to come back to headquarters to organise for him a big brain storm on the future of the Convention of Luma, South Africa's also part of that. And I uh, I really felt I could influence because it was me who was advising the, the minister how to go about with the subject and what to do and what not to do and of course, of course he made his own decision, and he didn't agree with everything I proposed but I could feel like, wow, this is interesting, you know you can influence, you can</p>
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>To make a meaningful contribution that effects, not just yourself, but the broader scale of humanity.</p>

<p>AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS</p>	<p>Yeah, it's interesting. I went with the Minister of Afghanistan to a police mission um, I was involved in the solutions when I was a Deputy General, on our contribution to the peace force in Mali, the Munishca, Munooshca, um and these are moments that I really felt that you're, you're doing something real, you know, this, this makes this, this has an impact on real people's lives, so it's, it's both fun and creative as, as my example in Brazil, but it's also profound and meaningful. And a, and every day it's something else.</p>
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>Thank you for sharing some of those personal experiences that you've had during your career thus far. We'll take a short break.</p>
<p>AD BREAK</p>	
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>Today we're talking to the Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to South Africa, Ms Marisa Gerards, who is not only deployed from the South African point of view but is also looks after Namibia, Botswana, Swaziland and Lesotho. In our previous conversation Ambassador Gerards spoke about her various experiences from a Brazilian point of view, from Mali perspective and under the great banner of, co-create, where we looking at development initiatives coming through from a Netherlands point of view combining with the South African point of view so that we have a rich cross pollination of ideas and innovations. Particularly in the areas of science and technology, migration, education and entrepreneurship with the "House of the Future" being launched in the next few weeks. Ambassador our programme is all about gender equality, which increasingly, is a global focus I'm happy to say and with that I think there comes a certain amount of responsibility, on them is building female leadership capacity. From your perspective how do you see female leadership, whether it is in parliamentary space, whether it is in the education or business world?</p>
<p>AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS</p>	<p>Well I think female leadership is very important. We are half the population. We share this planet, so we better run it together as well I think. Um, but how, how to foster it because I can see that we have a different style and may be you cannot generalise like that but that's what I run into during my career that men and women, there leadership style is different and I think if you combine I think you get the best of both worlds and, and it's very powerful. In my last job I was Deputy Director General and I was working together with the Director General and so in a very close partnership and I could see that his, his style was very de., decisive, decisive, that's the word, yeah, very direct at taking decision within five minutes and I would be more, like, well what's the risk, let's think about this and that risk and maybe we should include this or that stakeholder so it would take him another half hour to take his decision but it would be a better one. And he also acknowledged that he really said that's it a really good and powerful partnership. And also for me it was very interesting because I thought, yeah women sometimes you know, go for it, take your decision, don't take, don't take too much time. So I, I think the combination is very important.</p>
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>What you saying is something which comes through in a lot of the conversations I've had that women look at the bigger picture and what all those little nuances will have as an impact on the overall decision. Whereas sometimes from a male point of view they focus on one particular issue and, and go for it.</p>
<p>AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS</p>	<p>Yup absolutely. That's also my experience, so I think the combination is also very powerful, cause you, you end up taking better decisions.</p>

DR. MALKA	I agree with you. You have that complimentary perspective on, on making the right choices and looking at actually how much information do you need to, to make the appropriate decision. And from gender quality point of view, being a women, does that make gender equality closer to your heart.
AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS	It's difficult to tell because I cannot compare but for sure it's on my mind. You're aware of it, you know the complexities, you see your sisters, you see what position there in. You're more, I think, incline in helping them, may be mentoring them or um, you know seeing the position they in. I mean I've been on committee's um, in the Netherlands, where they select women for the higher position for the Ambassadors position and I could see that men was sometimes thinking for women as well, you know. When we were talking about in um, um, assignment for one women ambassa, ambasadarial position they would say well but she has young children. Well, yes, why, I mean, if a man has young children we won't mention it but if, if it's a women it's, it's something against her or let's ask her, let's ask her what she thinks. So I thought it was very interesting you know, so it is more on my mind, yar I think so.
DR. MALKA	And with that it reminds me, a good few years ago when Hillary Clinton, was, was running her first presidential campaign and, and then running through with the next few years, that when her daughter had a baby that they were saying well you know how could a grandmother be pushed up for presidency. The excuses that come through are often so ludicrous.
AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS	Yeah, so, so you need women also in these kind of settings to ask these questions. You know, to make men aware of, of their prejudices may be. And in the Netherlands they were very open for that so it was a very nice interaction I think. Not have any complaints about my Dutch colleagues, but sometimes you had to remind them.
DR. MALKA	I, I think that's a very important point, particular from a prejudice prospective. And in your opinion, what areas do you think we need to build on the most to benefit women in the future?
AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS	Um, well I think leadership is very important. Um, I think we should uh, we should strengthen that, we have a big programme in the Netherlands it's called FLOW. It stands for I think, Female Leadership and Opportunities or maybe I should check cause I think it's interesting its open for organisations on the African continent, so maybe I should just look it up. Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women. That's what it stands for, FLOW. I think that's very important, it's about leadership um, um,
DR. MALKA	And is that a programme which anyone within the continent can have access to?
AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS	Yes, yes. It's run from the Hague, it's run from the Hague, so it's a central budget. I also have some budget here at the Embassy. I'll ask for more because when I, when I uh, when I started my assignment here and I saw, you know, how much is happening I asked for a little bit more budget to see what I could do because it is more on mind I think gender issues and I can see it's also here in South Africa. So we have a little bit more budget. I, I teamed up with a Dutch NGO, it's called HEFOS, to run it for us because I don't have so much personal but um, and we will focus it specially on gender. I had quite a meetings at the residence of different gender groups, also to get a little bit more of a feel for the subject, to learn a little bit more about it. I also teamed up with five female ambassadors with, with the Norwegian and a Danish colleague in particular because we are very like-minded in our countries as well. Our policies are very like-minded.

DR. MALKA	And very pro-women.
AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS	Very pro-women, yeah, so therefore you can also see it in all these charts. The Nordics are always together with the Belgium and the Netherlands are always uh in the top ten, twenty of these kind of charts. So we are very like-minded. So we said to one another, lets team up a little bit. We visited the minister of women affairs and, and met her staff as well, discussing these issues and we had a women’s lunch because of the month in August and, and I organised together with the Vice Chancellor of the UP, University of Pretoria. And it was a great meeting. It’s just good to connect, to know each other um. To help each other maybe now and again.
DR. MALKA	And building a female network because one of the elements again that I’ve come to, to learn is that female networks are very strong, but that tends to be more on the social side as opposed to building a business network and if you look at it from a male point of view they’ve got very robust networks.
AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS	Yeah and, and it’s even unconscious for them I think. It’s even something that’s not so much on their mind but it’s just there because they majority in higher position, so, I don’t blame them for that, I understand that it’s works like that but so we should now and again connect as well. I thought it was very interesting because in one of the five countries where I presented my, my credentials I had a talk with the Prime Minister as well and in the room all his assistants and advisors were all men and there was just one women and when they came by to present themselves she shook hands with me, she, she gave me her name and then she said up with girls, up with girls, yeah, I thought it’s this kind of bond that you have and you proud when you see a women in a high position and there will be a time I think when it’s 50/50 that we won’t be so much aware of it any more but uh uh until that moment.
DR. MALKA	Yeah, in order to get there we will have to work a little bit harder.
AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS	Yeah, I think so.
DR. MALKA	And whilst we on the point of view from almost the political landscape space, the latest statics inter-parliamentary union indicates that South Africa’s presently ranked seventh regarding female representation in parliament and other countries in, in Africa, Rwanda is standing ahead in, in leaps and bounds as being the top country but Senegal holds sixth position, yet when I look at ??? reference in the so called leading countries, the like of the USA, only 75 th , France 46 th , UK 38 th , it often makes a person question why those countries could have such a low representation of women in parliament, given as we said, the women account for, if not more, at least 50 percent of the population. Can you share with us your opinion on the matter. And especially given that the Netherlands is in a respectable 17 th position.
AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS	Yes, yes, it’s interesting because you see that in the top twenty uh quite a lot of African countries as well as Latin American and Nordics like the four Nordic countries in Europe, Belgium, Netherlands and, and Spain as well. Um, yeah, why is that, I mean, if I talk for my own country I can see that every time we approach elections it’s an issue in the media, it’s being discussed. Partly this will be questions you know, how many women will be on your ballots, how you going to deal with this subject, women are pushing forward. We have our labour party uh, who tries to have a 50/50

	<p>percent you know, list of, of people being, being allegeable for, for, for, for the ballot. Um, but it's interesting because you also see in the discussion that people will say but we don't have enough women, we don't know enough women, women don't have this ambition and maybe on the one side some of it's a little true because I feel that sometimes women are insecure and they need a little more encouragement but I don't think it's all together true. I think there are lots of women who are very ambitious and you know, have the right back ground and you also really have to look for them, make sure that they on your list and I find it very interesting we have this um, she used to be in um, um minister in our country and also a commissioner in the European Commission, she's called Nelly Kush, and what she does every time also when the cabinet is, is putting together uh, you know the, the team is being formatted, um, she will ask the one in charge, how many women are you going to put in your cabinets, and then always yeah, I don't know, we don't have enough qualified women and then she will print in the news a list of at least 20 or 30 women who have the right qualifications to show that, that they there, go for it, ask them. So I think it is a little both sides.</p>
DR MALKA	She sounds like a fantastic activist.
AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS	She is. She's very good.
DR MALKA	And really demonstrating that these are capable so please don't make excuses
AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS	Right!
DR MALKA	Very interesting. Now Ambassador today you are representative of Netherlands in South Africa as well as Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland and as such, you've become a role model providing evidence to many women and girls that with hard work, perseverance, dedication and often with a certain amount of personal sacrifice that anything can be achieved. Can you share with us some of the gender challenges that you've experienced during your career and have overcome.
AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS	Yeah, it's interesting because you know I had just started my career um, in a very relaxed way to learn, take opportunities, try to do my job in a good way and it lead from one promotion to the other um, it's more when I, when I really ended up in the high positions in the ministry, like I explained to you before, in these kind of selection committee's, that I felt a little bit of the tension on whose going to make the next step. But my, my advice would really be don't be too nervous about it, try to do your job in the best way possible and, and keep on learning and don't be to, to stressed. But maybe it's also easy for me because I'm from a country the Netherlands, where maybe there are more opportunities women than in other countries in the world so um, maybe I've been too privileged.
DR. MALKA	But look it's about having a community, community is, is national space, but where people are more conscentised about the roles that women can do, what, there really, the possibilities are endless and they not confined to certain gender parameters.
AMBASSADOR	Yeah. You know I think it helps that you know I, I, really had a mother

<p>OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS</p>	<p>who empowered me, who um, I mean, when, when she was getting married in 56 she was fired because she was getting married. She was working for the government and in those years, when you were a women and when you got married you could not work any longer for the government because you were taking the job of a man who had to provide for his family. Can you imagine. It's quite, it's kind of in, interesting isn't it.</p>
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>I'm sitting here with my jaw dropping open.</p>
<p>AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS</p>	<p>I mean, yeah, this is the Netherlands and I'm, I'm sure that's not the only country in Northern Europe where this happened in that, in that, I mean it's not even hundred years ago that we go our voting rights in the Netherlands in 1918. So it's um it's, it's really a short period of time since then.</p>
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>And from your mom perspective what did she do in terms of, did she fight back or did she just</p>
<p>AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS</p>	<p>She was very angry about it, she was very angry about because she met my father uh, they were both working for the social service in Amsterdam, so she was very dedicated. She was a social worker you know, looking after kids who were in, in difficult situations and, and you know she was very dedicated, as was my father and then they got married and she got fired, so she was really upset about it. And she, she went back to school, studied, and, and, and she started working again, but not for the government then but just more in, in, in another position and, and she really empowered me, she really made sure that I, I got a good education and that I was confident and that I would look for my opportunities and so I think that's really, really important, to have some kind of a role model in your uh, in your surroundings. And if it cannot be your mother or your grandmother, then, then maybe it's a friend or someone else or a teacher or. It, it really helps, I really believe in is mentoring and I also really did that when I was in the ministry of foreign affairs uh. We had lots of women who would go to certain classes or courses and they would, they would tell them you know, go to someone in your own company uh, that could, that's in a position higher that could maybe mentor you or lead. I would always do that when they would come up to me because I think it's important.</p>
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>I think you totally right on having mentorship values, having role models in place but also reflecting how much has changed for women's rights in, in a relatively short space of time. Whether it's from a voting point of view or ridiculous policies, which thankfully have, have changed.</p>
<p>AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS</p>	<p>Yeah, so, so in that sense I would also really like to encourage women in culture, it's not something static, it's not something you know, that's, that's, that's gona be there forever. It's, it's you know, it's subject to change and, and if I see how much change in my own country. I would really like to encourage women that they can make that change and I also met lots of women um, both here in South Africa but also in my former positions that really made that change. Sometimes one step at a time but still.</p>
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>And often I always find that there is a clash as we moving forward into, into modern day and realising human rights and women rights, that we can't keep put, using culture, or religion as crutches as excuses.</p>
<p>AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS</p>	<p>No, I think so, and also I think like, like the constitution in South Africa but also in other countries here in this region, just, just go the legal route as well. I, I spoke to a judge in Botswana who uh, made a very important</p>

– MARISA GERARDS	ruling on inheritance where, through the traditional courts women could not inherit and he, you know, checked with the constitution and said it was unconstitutional, so he, he ruled differently and of course it can be a bit of a shock at first but I think these kind of steps we have to take.
DR. MALKA	Er, absolutely. We'll take a short break.
AD BREAK	
DR. MALKA	You're listening to Womanity – Woman in Unity on Channel Africa. The voice of the African renaissance on frequency 9625 kilo hertz on the 31 meter band. Also available on DSTV, channel 902. Today we're talking to the Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to South Africa, to Namibia, Botswana, Swaziland and Lesotho, Ms Marisa Gerards. We would love to receive your comments on twitter at Womannity Talk. In our previous conversation we spoke about mentorship, we spoke about role modelling and emphasised leadership particularly with some of the initiatives that are coming out of the Netherlands with FLOW, female leadership opportunities for women. We also talked about the role of women within the parliamentary space and how the Nordic countries, Latin America and Africa in particular are coming to the top within the parliamentary elements and movement to empower more women. Ambassador we are now coming into the later part of the show. One of the questions I ask all my guests on this programme, who have made significant in their respective fields, it about the factors they feel have contributed to their success. Some talk about the hard work, others speak about their mothers. Can you please share with us, in your opinion, what have been some of those factors to your success.
AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS	Yes, I already mentioned my mother because she has been very important for me. She was a very important role model, she was a very strong women. She was a women that got fired when she married because, you know, she was working for the government and married women couldn't work for the government in those years because they would steal the job of, of a man who had to provide for his family, so that made her really angry and I think she passed on some of this, maybe not anger, but ambition and, and, and strong will to me, encouraging me to study to, to, to go and, and try my luck and, and always tell me, you know, reach for the next step and Yes, you can do it, instead of, mmm, could I or am I good enough. So I think that has been really, really important for me to see that. Um, so I think if I look back to my youth, you know, being from, until I started studying, I think my mother is, is, is my main point of um, reference and I think something that was, was really um, life changing for me was that I have been ill for a short while when I was twenty, seriously ill, and that has been really, really important for me, because that suddenly at a very young age you realise that life is not taken for granted that it could also stop and maybe at an age when you don't expect it, cause when you're twenty you think you gona live for ever.
DR. MALKA	Absolutely!
AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS	And so that made me, I also felt that as a very defining moment in my life of, am I going to be depressed, or being scared all the time or, or am I going to get out of this stronger. And I decided to do the last, the later one. So it made me suddenly realise that I have limited time that I should really hurry up, achieve something, see the world, meet people, learn as much as I can and I'm fifty four and I'm still here so and I mean time wasn't limited at that moment in time, but it really made me into the person that I am.
DR. MALKA	I think those are really defining moments and what I take out of this is live

	every day likes it's your last.
AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS	Absolutely, absolutely. Just do it and don't get, and don't worry too much of what other people think of you, because that's something that's sucking away a lot of energy and it's, it's not leading to you know, anything, just go for it, and believe in yourself.
DR. MALKA	No one, No one can please everyone
AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS	Yeah, absolutely.
DR. MALKA	Now in closing our discussion today, could you please use this plate form to send a message of hope to all the women who are listening to us today as a message of inspiration because often gender equality might not be the first thing on peoples agenda, it may be a case of putting food on the h, making sure that their children have got clothes. It becomes a more pressurised reality forum.
AMBASSADOR OF NETHRLANDS – MARISA GERARDS	Yes, absolutely because I do realise that I come from a privileged back ground. Not that I'm rich, my family wasn't rich but I come from a country where women gets opportunities, some where I could go to university and you know, where health care was just available and, and so I feel very humbled um, when you speak of these women who have such a daily struggle to just take care of their children, to take care of their extended family and to make the next step as well. I mean that's, that's something really totally different and already, you know, living here in South Africa we've spent as an embassy our Mandela Day with a, a women's shelter, The Potters House, and we, we, we collected some money to get them a washing machine but more important was to spend that day with these women. Oh dear, what they've been going through and how they try to pick up their life again and, and to, to be some kind of stability for their children, I really do admire them. I'm able to give you one other example our, how humbled I feel when I meet this women and what they go through is this last um. I met the Kummama's, I don't know if you ever heard of them, it's a, it's a small..
DR. MALKA	No, can you tell us more.
AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS	I tell you about it, because this is such a beautiful organisation. It's called Dream Catcher. Is'nt that a wonderful term. What they do, is these are women and they call them Kummama's, I think it's a Zulu word and these are usually they are grandmothers and um, very often because uh, uh aids has been affecting so many families very often these women take care of their grandchildren because the generation in between was wiped out in, in, when, when the aids epp., aids epidemic was, was still you know, very, very strong and was really killing people um these women are looking for a way to provide for their family and what they do through this organisation Dream Catcher is that they try to build a very uh basic uh, bed and breakfast in their homes for tourist who, to spend some time with these families and the organisation trains them, helps them to have safe environment, to you know, to see how can provide for, for the basic needs of tourists and tourists gets the opportunities to spend some time with, with, with these families and I think it's so very, very special, for a tourist also to be in this kind of surroundings and to have this kind of interaction. And you can also cook with them, so they you can make a meal together for lunch or for dinner. And this organisation already

	<p>knocked on my door in the Netherlands before I came and, and we went with our daughter to spend the day with the Kummama's and I thought it was so wonderful. When I got in touch with Minister Hunikom of Tourism, I said to him, I said do you know about this, you from tourism and it's a tourist activity and he said mmm it's sounding interesting, what, what do you want me to do and I said, have lunch with me. We went into Soweto, had lunch and it was such a beautiful day and these women, these are the women you talking about, these are the women I really admire, you know, who really make a difference for their family, for their children, put bread on the table, don't give up you know, be creative, think of the next step and I only feel humble when I, when I meet these women because my life has been easy compared to that.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Thank you very much. It's been wonderful having you here today and for sharing the developments and the elements in terms of the relationship between the Netherland and the various governments within Southern Africa. I really look forward to hearing more about the House of the Future and how that event leads onto more components on sustainability and adaptability. So thank you for joining us.</p>
AMBASSADOR OF NETHERLANDS – MARISA GERARDS	<p>Thank you so much. I'll keep you informed.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>You have been listening to Womannity – Woman in Unity on Channel Africa. The voice of the African renaissance and we have been talking to the Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to South Africa, Ms Marisa Gerards.</p>
<p>END OF PROGRAM</p>	