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PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: DR. BERNADETTE LAHAI

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 Dr Bernadette Lahai, Vice-President of the Pan African Parliament, a minority leader in the Parliament of Sierra Leone. Welcome to the show, Dr Lahai.
DR. LAHAI	Thank you.
DR. MALKA	Dr. Lahai, this year I understand you were elected as Vice-President at the Pan African Parliament representing the Western African region. The Pan African Parliament is described as one Africa, one voice. It was established as an organ of the African Union in order to ensure the full participation of African people in the Development and Economic Integration of the continent. Can you tell us a little bit more about the Pan African Parliament and some of its unified actions across the continent?
DR. LAHAI	Yes, indeed the Pan African Parliament is one of the ten organs of the African Union and we are the Legislative arm of the African Union, with the responsibility of making laws but at the same time, as a Parliament representing the voices of the African people ensuring that we bring them fully into the development discourses of the Pan African Parliament, and also ensuring that especially women, the youth, the vulnerable groups are also involved in the decision making, but we are also charged with the responsibility through our legislative work, to continue with the quests for peace and security on the continent which for the time being you know, is something far-fetched, especially with a lot of conflicts all over Africa. Through our work also we have in the ... continental integration true intra-African trade is very key because currently Africa is trading very little with each other. We are also, as a Parliament encouraged to build on the diversity of our continent. Our continent is as diverse but we should look at diversity more from the positive point of view, how do we build on those diversities. How do we see it as an opportunity to achieve the goals of the African Union. So this is in short what the African Parliament is and we work through several structures. We have the Bureau, the Bureau is made up of the President and four Vice-Presidents, each President is representing a region. The Vice-President also, the President also represents a region, so, and we work through committees and caucuses. We have ten permanent committees and we also have two caucuses, a Caucus on Youth and a Caucus on Women.
DR. MALKA	Can you tell us a little bit more about the Women's Caucus?
DR. LAHAI	Yes, the Women's Caucus is an integral part of the structure of the Pan

	African Parliament, women come from all over the fifty-four countries that constitutes the Pan African Parliament. So this is a cross-party Women's Caucus with the aim of mainstreaming the issues of gender in the Pan African Parliament agenda.
DR. MALKA	Can you tell us more in terms of some of the work that the Caucus has achieved?
DR. LAHAI	Yes, the Caucus works through the Caucus Bureau. The Bureau develops annual work programme, that is funded by both the African Union and also other interested donor partners, like GIZ, ACBF, UNEP or Climate Parliament and UNICEF depending on the interest of the donors. Annually the Women's Caucus organizes a number of women's conferences, bring former female party members, bring women Parliamentarians from national Parliaments, bring women in the civil society, young ladies and across all sectors in Africa and also outside of Africa. Every year there's a theme, like this year the theme was the same as the African Union, Empowering Women for Economic Development, that was the theme. And under those themes we discussed the Maputo Protocol, we discussed land rights as a very key means of empowering women and we normally also bring the gender division of the African Union so that it tells us exactly what are their programmes, like the African Women's Fund, how is the fund administered, how do you apply, how do you get access to the funding. We have also in the past had several meetings and workshops like on female genital mutilation. We have worked on reproductive heads and rights of women, we have looked at education of women and we also supplement this with visits outside of the seats of Parliament. For example, I know that there is a plan to visit Sahrawi, to look at the situation of the women in Sahrawi which is a very precarious situation. We also have women in refugee camps. There is also a plan for a food mission to one or two countries that are currently in conflict and where you have huge refugee camps to look at the situation of women. The Women's Caucus also take up issues of women in the plenary and they come out with motions, for example when the Ebola struck West Africa.
DR. MALKA	And that must have been very significant given that Sierra Leone's in that region for you personally?
DR. LAHAI	Yes, it was very significant because the Women's Caucus together with the Commission Health had to move against motion to debate the situation of the Ebola, especially women and children and at the end of the day, resolutions were made and recommendations made to ask for increased resources to fight the Ebola, to also look at more effective ways of monitoring the spread of the Ebola across regions. The Women's Caucus are also very pushing for the ratification and signing of some of those important gender related protocols, so these are just some of the issues that the Pan African Women Caucus are addressing.
DR. MALKA	It sounds incredible and taking things from a global point of view, looking at them on a regional point of view and also implementing from a national perspective and we know that gender equality is increasingly a global focus. We've seen for instance with the SADC Gender Protocol that it's set 2015 as its target for equal representation and several countries, the likes of South Africa,

	Malawi are working to make changes to promote new legislation and in support of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. What are your perspectives on this, and do you think that legislation alone can improve gender gaps?
DR. LAHAI	No, legislation alone cannot but what legislation does is to, you use an instrument to hold the members accountable for their action or inaction when it comes to gender equality, but there are also other equally important factors that must be taken into consideration. As a short and long term measure, education is going to be key. Education of women and girls, both formal and non-formal education because we have some women that may not now be available for formal education because of their age, but they do need non-formal education what we call, functional literacy, functional education, for example a woman agriculturist would need to be functional in her agricultural work, in terms for an example, application of new technologies, the fertilizers, the pesticides in the sale of her produce, she needs to be functional.
DR. MALKA	Functional, but she also needs to be aware of what her rights are in society, as a woman.
DR. LAHAI	Yes, yes, that's it, so education is just one that is being able to read and write or being able to function within your own sphere. So it's going to be key, because alongside the education also, is we need to expose the women to their rights. The rights is important to know, we need to promote their rights, we need to put their rights because it has a debilitating effect on women's empowerment. Most women may have access to land maybe through their husbands or through their relatives, but they may not have control over the land, so where a woman has not got this control over the land so, what she can do on that land is so limited, that is why you find out that most of women's orientation in agriculture is for the family and the domestic markets you know, very little for the global market because of these type of restrictions.
DR. MALKA	It's almost short-term and very subsistent living off the land. And Dr. Lahai, one of the points which is coming out of this, we're talking about women's rights, land ownership. I often think that gender equality, particularly in Africa, is almost constrained because it touches on so many sensitive points, one of them, being for me, culture, religion, tradition. Do you think that with elements like the Maputo Protocol that you've mentioned now that we'll be able to overcome these points and areas for the sake of women's development?
DR. LAHAI	It's going to be a huge challenge because again, it's time alone, these are not stand-alone variables. They operate within the complex mix. The religion, culture would not by their own go away. We need to educate more people, but we also need to ensure that the men themselves that are the gatekeepers for perpetuating these norms, these cultural norms, religious norms themselves are brought along the discourses, to see how in fact you know, they can deconstruct their minds on some of this because some of this really have no, no basis, no basis, you know but they persist, just because we don't have enough women out there to challenge this. We have made progress because there happened things that before now, you know, you'll not dream of it, it's happening. We never thought that we would have female presidents, we never thought we'd have a female Attorney-General, we would never thought we'd have female Chief

	Justice, female Brigadiers, so it's happening.
DR. MALKA	And there's much greater visibility of women who are occupying those primary role model positions which in effect then influence our younger women as they go through on their journey.
AD BREAK	
DR. MALKA	Dr. Lahai, one of the elements which comes through very strongly in everything that you've spoken about is education, you seem to be an avid supporter of education and I understand that recently you spoke at the Seventh Annual Women in Politics Conference and your talk's emphasis was not only on the importance of attaining academic qualifications but more specifically getting the appropriate qualifications for your position and continuous learning. Knowledge is crucial to empowerment, but do you consider having the right qualifications, the level, as well as subject matter as tools to help women level the playing field, especially in male dominated environments?
DR. LAHAI	Well, knowledge is always going to be key, there may be other intervening factors, but you need to know what you are doing. It's very important, you need to have the necessary tools, you need to equip yourself academically because the world is becoming increasingly complex and you no longer can just rely on common sense and what is the beauty of having equipped yourself is that you go out there and you compete based on what you know and not maybe your gender although the gender will always come in you know, in such a ways they will always come in because when you go and compete for jobs, you know, they never ask a man do you have children, how would those children be looked after, if you have this job or when you go for scholarship interviews for overseas and I remember when I went for overseas, I had two small daughters, you know I think that's also in 1994, the interview was 1993 and by 1993 my eldest daughter was five years and my youngest daughter was three years and when I went for the interview, scholarship interview that was for Commonwealth. After they have interviewed me, and I answered all my questions they said, Doctor, Mrs Lahai, are you married? I said yes, do you have children, I said yes, they said how old are they? I said five and three years, and how are you going to leave them to go and study? Oh, I hit the roof, I said if you interview my husband, you will not ask him, Mr Lahai, how will you leave those children, because you are assuming that Mr Lahai has a Mrs Lahai.
DR. MALKA	Has a Mrs. Lahai.
DR. LAHAI	A dutiful woman who will stay behind with the children, for Mr Lahai to go and improve himself. I said well if you want to know my answer, I have Mr Lahai, a dutiful husband, he will stay behind and look after the five year and three year old, while I go and also improve myself.
DR. MALKA	But Dr. Lahai it's not only about women going through to pursue education, we see it in almost every field, spectrum that there's this constant juggle between career, motherhood, balance and it always seems to be a controversial issue and as you rightly said, that in an interview, a man would not be asked these types of questions, it's just that expectation that a woman is going to do it. How do you think we can overcome more of these issues?
DR. LAHAI	Well, you see we are breaking the barriers, the more successful we are in managing all of this together, the better we are going to convince our male

	folks that look here, reproductive responsibilities should not be an encumbrance for a woman's achievement. We have a good number of success stories, where you know, women have managed beautifully, have gone up the career ladder, still with children.
DR. MALKA	And what's also important is the continuous nature of learning but if you can't do it because your circumstances at the particular age group when everybody expects you to go and learn and study and achieve but if you've got other things, responsibilities to take care of, whether it's children, family that you can put things on hold, you can take them up at a later stage in your life, it's not the end of the world and I think that's ...
DR. LAHAI	Yes, and I think the world is becoming such that you know that facilities and provisions are now being made, you know for later life, you know life skills. Now you really don't have to move physically from where you are to have a degree, you have on-line courses, you have distance education. There are lots of innovations now. It's important that we more and more encourage this sort of new ways of learning because you don't want to condemn yourself for life because the children grow up, they go, what do you do? Do you stay at home, no, no.
DR. MALKA	There's so many things, there's new roles, positions which didn't exist five, ten years ago.
DR. LAHAI	Yes, yes.
AD BREAK	
DR. MALKA	Dr. Lahai, a few moments ago we were talking about the different perceptions of men and women faced in different situations and one of the highlights you spoke about was when you were doing your interview for your sponsorship to do your PhD. After the last economic collapse in Wall street in 2008, there was a very interesting piece of research which compared key positions behaviour. So looking at based on gender and they specifically looked at the market traders and the CEOs and policy makers in the U.S.A. during that period which led to the downfall. And the result indicated that men in comparison to their female counterparts took significantly more risks which led to those unavoidable results and after that study, more research was conducted and the results were fairly conclusive indicating that women in leadership positions show far more compassion to finding peaceful solutions based on compromise in comparison to men holding a similar role. What's your perspective on the matter?
DR. LAHAI	Yes, we have seen these many examples now, especially when you look at CEOs that are women and the resilience of the organisation that especially when you do this economic drawdown because I always say that some of these things do not happen overnight. You start seeing the signs on the wall and that is where the issue of foresight, the issue of foresight comes in. Women are always more long term in their activities, they tend to look at the long term effect of their actions of their behaviour. Of course, it will come with an opportunity costs, delaying immediate benefits, short-term benefits you know, for a longer term benefit that is going to bring in a lot of other benefits along, complementary benefits is important so that and women also come with their own feminine instinct, their maternal instinct, they're cautious, intuitive, patience is also very important, the ability to also discern, you are not just observing for the sake of observation but it

	<p>goes beyond you are to discern, you know they have all of these qualities and when it also comes to being flexible, you know, there is flexibility, if it doesn't work you don't have to continue doing the same thing to get the same result, you are open to changes, you are being flexible and this is what makes most of the companies that have women as CEOs that especially in the face of the economic problem you know, the shock was less than in male headed institutions.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>So in effect you see these as almost female characteristics that are being passed, transmitted throughout the organisation to help it become more sustainable that their almost I suppose hesitancy or caution, to take risks is what holds the company in better ground and being more resilient and I often find in the conversations that I've had with various ladies in their respective fields of leadership, is that women tend to have a more holistic view, they look at the world in its larger piece, how things join together and that vision seems to be a much rounder perspective.</p>
DR. LAHAI	<p>Yes, because you know life is not isolated pieces, you know, life is complex, made up of different parts and you need to understand the different parts that make the whole and that is good because then you have a complete story, you have a complete idea of what you are dealing with or the situation at hand, so this is very important you know, especially for long term perspective, vision of an institution.</p>
<p>AD BREAK</p>	
DR. MALKA	<p>Dr. Lahai, throughout the different radio programmes that I've had with this particular show, I've asked all of our guests who have made tremendous achievements in their respective fields of expertise about the factors which they consider contribute to their success, some talk about hard work, others talk about perseverance, many talk about the role of a strong woman in their life, whether it was their mother or their grandmother. Can you please tell us in your opinion, what have been the key drivers to your success?</p>
DR. LAHAI 27.25	<p>Well, several drivers, for a girl like me, coming from a country where patriarchy is at its best. Also, where you know, the education level is low, with very few female role models when I was growing up. It took a strong mother and a strong father, very strong mother and a very strong father who believed in education, who believed in education of the girl child.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And that's very important, the education of a girl child, particularly in the era that you grew up in.</p>
DR. LAHAI	<p>Yes, I grew up in the rural area. My father had a dual job, he worked in the diamond mining company but he was also a fulltime farmer at the same time and he always made sure that we went back to our village, where he did the farming. I come from a polygamous family. My father had several wives and I had about seventeen brothers and sisters but my father believed in education because he would always gather us together and say, when I die I will not leave you a bank account, I will not leave you a fabulous savings, but when he's paying our fees, this is what he would always tell us, this is your bank account I've opened for you. If school fees are the monies that I'm depositing in those bank accounts, if you do well your bank account will grow, your savings will grow, so he stopped at nothing to educate us. If it meant pledging the cocoa farm or the coco farm for a certain period just so that he has the school fees for us,</p>

	<p>not to be late for school, he would do it. I remember when I went to sixth form, then I got admission to university. The university fees were 303 Leones now it will be like millions and millions of Leones, that was a huge sum of money then. My father didn't have this money but he had property, he had built three houses and he did something that not many fathers will ever do, in fact he was dissuaded from doing what he was about to do. Time was coming for me to go to university, there was no money. So he sold three houses against all advice from our grandmothers, our grandfathers, our uncles. He said no, my daughter has passed to go to university, I cannot have this house and not let my child go, that was how I had to go to university.</p>
DR. MALKA	Dr. Lahai, I've got goose bumps.
DR. LAHAI	<p>And my father is alive, he's 94 years old and I've paid him back. I've built him better houses than the ones that he sold for me, for my education. So my mother and my father have been big inspiration to me but as I went along with life, you know I've also met my teachers. There were teachers that you know, they want to make you learn. I come across those teachers, they're still primary school teachers but I have big respect for them. I make, wherever I am you know, I hold their hand and I introduce them I say, if I am this today, it's the result of this teacher. You know we had those young beautiful teachers, female teachers that came from the colleges you know. They were so beautiful, we admired them, we wanted to be like them, you know and then as I went forward in life, I met my husband, you know my husband is also a professional. I met him when I was doing my Masters but my political life, you know my husband has played a big role in my political life, because not all husbands will allow a wife to be a politician, not all husbands would have allowed me to go and study and leave the children with him and says to me he can never withstand the rigours of politics. I said well this is me. I was never a political being really but the urge of making a difference to women.</p>
DR. MALKA	Can you tell us more about your decision to go into politics, to make a difference for women?
DR. LAHAI	<p>Because in 2002, after our war, that was the second democratic multi-party elections in 2002 in Sierra Leone we had the women's organisations, the Fifty-Fifty Group. They were agitating for women to go into politics but no woman wanted to go. They went to the President, President we want women. He said, yes well bring the women, where are the women? So I was approached by the Fifty-Fifty Group, I am asked if I want to go to Parliament. I said well I've never really thought of politics, that is the last thing, it was violence, it was rough and all those things the politics we used to know. But I was convinced and I made up my mind because that is where we need to make a difference, the Parliament where the laws are made, where the policies are, where we make the policies, we should look at those policies so that we make gender sensitive policies you know we can by our very presence there, you know that can send a big message. So that was how in 2002 I went into politics and I've been there ever since.</p>
DR. MALKA	It sounds as though you were doing tremendous work that you were almost, your dad and your mom inspired you to be a better person, to develop yourself and they sacrificed elements for you to achieve but now you're in this position where you're able to give back to not just your own immediate family but in

	<p>particular with women. Dr. Lahai, we're now coming to the end of the programme, unfortunately, and during your career as you've described here today, no matter what position or area of responsibility that you were heading, you've done tremendous work concerning women's development. In closing the discussion today, could you please use this platform to send a message of hope or inspiration to all those women who are listening to us on the continent, that due to circumstances, they might find themselves still in the daily struggle of life, taking care of their children, making sure that there is enough food on the table, the gender equality isn't the first item on their agenda.</p>
DR. LAHAI	<p>Yes, what I would say to women out there is that our destiny is in our hands. The destiny of women is in the hands of the women themselves. Maybe what I have said seems rosy but there are times when you know the challenge has been insurmountable. There are times when I go into my room, I might cry, but I have a policy I will never cry publicly. Sometimes the challenges are too much but in whatever I have done I've always been focused, it was very important. You should know what you want in life. You should know what you want in life and once you know what you want in life, you have to put every effort in it. Hard work is also very key. I'm not easily discouraged. I'm a very strong person, I have a lot of faith in what I can do. I'm also disciplined.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Dr Lahai, for me, my take-out is that it is about focus, confidence, being resourceful, being resilient, being committed to what you've decided to undertake, having self-actualisation, having integrity and strong morals as being guiding factors for anyone to achieve success.</p>
DR. LAHAI	<p>Yes, and then lastly, but not the least, the fear of God.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Thank you very much for sharing your time with us today, for sharing your stories, your life journey with us, we really appreciate it.</p>
<p>END PROGRAM</p>	