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PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: CORNELIA SEPTEMBER –FORMER MINISTER OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS, CURRENTLY MP RSA

SPEAKER	TRANSCRIPTION
DR. MALKA	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	Joining us in studio today is Miss Cornelia September better known as Connie September, she has been a member of Parliament for the African National Congress since 1999; Minister of Human Settlements Portfolio; she has served on various portfolio committees including Chairperson for the portfolio committee on Water Affairs and Forestry as well as Convenor of Peace and Stability Cluster; she obtained a Master's degree in technology; she is a former Trade Unionist and currently serves on the Magistrates Commission. Welcome to the show.
MS CORNELIA SEPTEMBER	Thank you very much for having me.
DR. MALKA	One of the things that I found very striking when I read about you and I was preparing for this show was an article with a title saying "From a humble factory worker to Cabinet Minister, this is the story of a dedicated Capetonian whose sacrifices reflected the struggle" and I don't think that anyone could put more emotion than this into one sentence. Does hearing this still stir some emotions in you on the long road that you've taken over the years that have brought you to where you are today?
MS CORNELIA SEPTEMBER	I think certainly it absolutely never goes away. I try and remind myself most of the time about where I came from through pictures at home. I like the artwork that the people on the street does, that depicts the sort of housing that we had and some instances still have and so I do that and when people come to the home I says that is where I came from, I too have stayed in a one roomed house and it so much reminds one of the road that we have to conquer as South Africans and indeed many of the successes that we've had in the country, so yes it's still very much with me.
DR. MALKA	That must be an incredible collection then of history within that artwork that you've gathered?
MS CORNELIA SEPTEMBER	It does, yes it absolutely is a good collection, I obviously look at my own photos also that taken at the different houses that we have stayed, as tiny as they were and so on, and I think there's no better way in describing and celebrating what we have been able to achieve in South Africa since 1994 when we look at where we have come from and where we have taken this country to, as opposed to just you know, me as an individual.
DR. MALKA	And do you sometimes find yourself thinking back to those years pre 1994 of what tomorrow would bring considering what you know today?
MS CORNELIA SEPTEMBER	Certainly you know my daughter also remains my moral compass. I will not forget when she was a tiny daughter and we had to take the train to somewhere on the southern suburbs Cape Flats, well on the Cape Flats line, she couldn't understand why we had to walk past so many coaches

	<p>and why we had to go and get into a coach so far when we had to walk past all the others and I had to explain to her as tiny as she was, not school age yet, that we have apartheid in the country and that means that some of us can only sit in these coaches and others not, some of us had to sit at the top part of the bus whilst others could sit downstairs and so I think if you look at the development at that level of her also, and you look at again these are the achievements that we have been able to make in South Africa of where we've come to. Her children now don't have to ask those questions, they can simply get into, if they indeed get into a train, they can get into any coach.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>It's a totally different generation now and that's transformed within one generation I think that that is always an element that I appreciate.</p>
MS CORNELIA SEPTEMBER	<p>Indeed.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And in terms of the achievements that you've acquired over the years, have you succeeded to satisfy all that you wanted to do or are there still many more pages in the book of life to be filled?</p>
MS CORNELIA SEPTEMBER	<p>Well now that you are talking about a book I've really been struggling to put together a book myself in, you know, depicting I think these things that we are talking about also but when we answer the question then my journey has never been a journey of me and me alone. My journey has always been a collective journey, it's been a journey of together we have been able to have achievements, we've been able to have challenges and we've been able to say to ourself but what more is there that we need to do and so I think that that collectivism has helped my journey very much because there has always been the helping hand, the crutch that you can lean on or a journey of, in my own instance, the love and respect and the compliments from my late mother and the rest of my family whose structure was extremely important in this if you do not have these important structures that support you, by no means is it possible that you can, you know, walk this long road that Nelson Mandela spoke of alone in this instance.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And often I think it's those enablers that people tend to forget or tend to dismiss but really the reality of an individual's success is so dependent on the collective efforts from all of those enablers around us.</p>
MS CORNELIA SEPTEMBER	<p>And they need to be celebrated also because without them you know, you cannot claim any success both of a country, you as an individual and in most instances in organisation we have learned that very much. We've learned what it means to be democratic, we've learned what it means to build organisation, we've learned what it means to just talk about what does it mean to ask for a mandate and that word in itself, if you understand it, means that you have to remain within the collectivism, you have to remain with negotiating, you have to remain with getting ideas, you have to remain with how decisions are being put together and I think it's a very, it's a very interesting world, it's a very strong foundation that we have been able to inculcate and when people don't understand how we do or how we derive at things you'd have to understand this background that I'm talking about, that in fact the sort of South Africa that you have also now comes from these great traditions of men and women that did these things many, many years before I was even born. My happy moment is the fact that parents gave birth to me on 26th June and I'm happy about that because it's Freedom Charter day and so every year when the country celebrates Freedom Charter they celebrate my birthday also.</p>

DR. MALKA	And this year if I'm not mistaken it's our 60 th year that we're celebrating?
MS CORNELIA SEPTEMBER	Well of course I'm not 60 but yes it is the 60th year.
DR. MALKA	You were speaking a few moments ago in terms of our history, looking at the paths that our predecessors have undertaken in order to form where we are today and give us the tools and the drive and in your bio I read that when you began work in 1980 you were described as an apolitical woman, intent only on earning a humble day's wage as a textile worker in the Cape Town factory and 33 years later, approximately, President Jacob Zuma appointed you to his Ministry of Human Settlements, can you share with us a few of the landmarks in your career and when you understood that serving your country was a big part of your destiny?
MS CORNELIA SEPTEMBER	I indeed remember that very well. I was supposed to go to university and there was, there weren't the financial means to allow me to go to university and so after matric there were those problems and then I also after that had a baby. It was important for me to earn some income notwithstanding relying on the father to do that also and so I had to go and find a job and so all these different opportunities that were there they were not being realised and I said look I will go with you to Rextruform on Monday, so I ventured off to this big clothing company that employed about 6,000 workers then.....
DR. MALKA	Wow!
MS CORNELIA SEPTEMBERand I sat in this big room of an interview and they said to me yes you will get the job. So I got a job, it's a very silly name, it's what's called NES (Not Established Elsewhere) whatever that still means, don't ask me....
DR. MALKA	Not Established Elsewhere.....
MS CORNELIA SEPTEMBER	Yes whatever that means, I don't know.....
DR. MALKAthat's a very intriguing title.....
MS CORNELIA SEPTEMBERit was something connected to, I shouldn't attempt to explain it because it silly as it was, but they tried to get me into a more clerical kind of job, you've got matric and all of these things so you must do this thing and so that got me to land up in the clothing industry by absolute no planning, nothing like that. So when I got my first pay, we grew up in this home you've got to take your pay, you pray over this money that you've got and you've got to take it to your mother, doesn't matter how big you are and so I gave my mother this R30 and she says is this all that they gave you, can't they give you more and that starts my journey of earning R30 a week and we had to raise a daughter, we had to make sure that the rest of the family is also sorted out and from there it was the year that the turmoil in the country was very much there and I always tell people there was a stayaway and I couldn't understand what this was all about a stayaway and so I came to work and you know there was no-one there and all of that. That was probably the first and the last stayaway that they found me at the workplace because very soon, a year or two after that I found myself organising workers and slowly but surely started to get into the leadership of what we then called our target was we've got to get rid of the old TUCSA Union, it was the one that was very much of a family kind of a trade union that never sat and negotiated, they would have some tea in the office with some employer and they would announce in the newspaper, the little Union newspaper, we are happy to announce that the workers got a 50c increase.

DR. MALKA	So your approach was very hands-on and it involved the collective of all the people that were working within the organisation to come up and confront when there were injustices?
MS CORNELIA SEPTEMBER	Very much so we couldn't understand this thing that in the little knowledge that we had how's it possible that somebody can announce in a newspaper some 50c that they want to give us, for goodness sake, that's not what our life can be all about and so we slowly but surely decided we have to do something about it and we organised what was called one of the biggest and major strikes that the clothing industry has ever had in bringing out about 6,000 workers, boom, out, on the basis on we've got to have a better wage. We even went further than that when we did that, we organised this strike and they attempted to explain to us but there's an agreement which means we can't strike and I don't think those things deterred us what deterred us was the fact that we have got to get a better increase and changes needs to be brought about and so we did exactly that, so we went out and strike and some days after that the employers said that we can't stay on the premises anymore because we are not working and they will lock us out. It was the best thing that the employer could ever do to lock us out because we mobilised people much further than that, we brought those 6,000 workers out, the union's offices weren't very far lucky for us, up the road and we were able to have them in the big union, the building and of course the offices. We were then confronted with this family that was still there in the union and I happened to bump into the previous TUCSA General Secretary was very keen to meet me and I was not interested in the person but I think he realised that things have to change and change will have to come about and so we pride ourselves with the fact that at Rextruform we were able to organise and we did not get an increase for the workers at Rextruform, our strike led to an increase for workers of the entire clothing industry.
DR. MALKA	That's very significant.
MS CORNELIA SEPTEMBER	The entire industry we got an increase, not a 50c, we got much more than that, I can't remember the figure but, yes we asked for R15, yes, yes.
DR. MALKA	Well that's significantly different versus 50c increase.
MS CORNELIA SEPTEMBER	Absolutelyand we got that increase for the entire industry.
DR. MALKA	How did that make you feel?
MS CORNELIA SEPTEMBER	We felt absolutely great, we felt this is the best thing we think that these workers who are mainly women deserve it and we think that this is the start of bigger things to happen. We need to change this organisation and I think the history will speak for itself there was change came about in the organisation of clothing workers that led to the formation of the progressive unions that then came about soon thereafter we had the formation of the Garment and Allied Workers Union that brought together clothing workers from Cape Town, Eastern Cape, Johannesburg, KZN – Durban as they called it that time, well still called but I mean Natal as they called it at that time and we were then able to bring together, we brought together a group of people that were predominantly women but this group of people had something else that were interesting in themselves. We brought together coloured women, we brought together Indian women, we brought partly white women but the majority of....and African women, we brought the non-racial character of organisation together in what was then and there were very

	<p>many dear things that happened to these workers, they suddenly had to learn the different cultures, the different races, the different languages, by the time when we were on strike in Rextruform we taught them Nkosi Sikelel Iafrika, it was one of the biggest breakthroughs that we had because they understood Nkosi Sikelel to be a song for certain people in this country and when we were able to bring that together and say Nkosi Sikelel is a hymn that is at the back of the AME Church Hymn Book, they made the connection immediately and out of that strike was born the fact that those workers went back into the factory singing Nkosi Sikelel Iafrika, they were taught that and they believed that they had to open up their prayer with that song. Those workers were never the same after that and the employer realised that. They were called “girls” they were called “they”, they went back after that strike they were called, respected by their names, they were respected by who they were their dignity was given back.</p>
DR. MALKA	That is an incredible achievement because ultimately it is about dignity you want that recognition and you want to be recognised as an individual, a person that is capable, yes.
MS CORNELIA SEPTEMBER	Yes.
DR. MALKA	We’ll take a short break.
	AD BREAK
DR. MALKA	You’re listening to ‘Womanity – Women in Unity’ on Channel Africa, the voice of the African Renaissance on frequency 9625 KHz, on the 31 meter band also available on audio DSTV channel 902.
DR. MALKA	Today we’re talking to Ms Cornelia September, better known as Ms Connie September, who is currently member of Parliament, the African National Congress. In our previous segment Ms September spoke about her collection of the arts in terms of mapping her visual history, we also spoke about the work that she did in the textiles industry and how that radically transformed the entire industry and paved the way for reform on a salary scale across the country. Now Ms September I came across a comment from a gentlemen called Hasham Mohammed who spoke in his capacity of the Chairman of the Southern Suburbs Legal Advice Centre, he said describing you: <i>“I met her in August 1985 I was a student throwing petrol bombs at the time when the state of emergency was announced. Her demeanour has always been that of a leader but she is also a woman of humbleness and strict discipline. She has always had a deep rooted consciousness of justice and is always willing to relate to any issue in which people’s human rights are being violated”</i> . Articles over the years have painted a picture of a woman who has a relentless commitment to uplifting the poor and you elaborated on that in our previous segment, can you share with us has it been your strong sense of duty or your passion for making a difference that has kept you for so many years in the political arena and attentive to human rights?
MS CORNELIA SEPTEMBER	It comes from the following. I grew up with a formidable mother, my mother was more formidable than my father, he chose to be in and out of our lives, my mother stuck it out with us and she taught us resilience, she taught us respect, she taught us strength and she taught us that we don’t have to be nothing when we are poor and so she taught us what it means to be loyal and not loyal in the sense of you have to compromise and she taught us that when a task has been given then that task has to be done with the greatest respect and with the absolute hundred percent output that it requires and so we were driven by these humble and noble sentiments that my mother had. The second thing which is very

	<p>interesting in you saw that my surname is September and in South Africa there has yet to be an understanding as opposed to laughing about the surname September.....</p>
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>Can you elaborate?</p>
<p>MS CORNELIA SEPTEMBER</p>	<p>.....the history, why there are those of us whose surnames are September and so my drive around that the fact that there needs to be this change in a number of things has got to do with those of us who have these surnames our history comes from the slave history in South Africa and so the slave history in South Africa is depicted in the surnames that we are having and sometimes in some people's names. If you go around the country from all the 9 provinces there are these historical who are we, where do we come from, us South Africans, that I think needs to be dealt with much more. I was extremely excited when Judge Albie Sachs married a September, so we were having this conversation on the plane and I said I'm happy that you've also got a September and we've got to do something about this thing because the history of those of us whose surnames are January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November and December and all of that has to do with the fact that there our forbearers that were brought into this country through the slave trade and this slave trade got some people to deny us our surnames. I am in search of my surname, my surname, I'm happy to be September but I am pretty sure that I have another surname besides my father's surname and it's got to do with the fact that there were some people that had the audacity to call us what they wanted us to be so they decided that if their birthday is in September your surname will be September, if you were brought as a slave into this country in September, your surname will be September, whatever that is I can't elaborate on all of that their thinking that they had and so these things are part of the things that in the question that you are asking that drive me round humanity about justice, about right and what is wrong and the fact that the history of South Africa has yet to be told in relation to these different people that we are having in the country and what it meant and so I ventured off a little bit in going to search, I've not been too successful and I think there's something big that we have to do to make people understand this history that we are having. Why we have the surnames that we have, why we have the names that we have, what are our history, where do we come from and where eventually is that we need to take to and what is it that we celebrate so, I'm moving a little bit away from your original question but these are the two factors, my mother and this thing of this history where we are coming from that drives me to do many of the things that I, that I do and of course the respect for my...my... I grew up in a Christian religion also and so there was a lot of conflict when I entered politics because the Christian religion it's church it's extremely conservative but I had to hold onto what the religion teaches you what is right and what is wrong, so fine all these things enrolment.....all of these things and they were absolutely there that says we have to do what we have to do.</p>
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>So that validation and what you're saying now leads me onto my next question where I ask all of my guests who've come on this show, in terms of the factors that they feel have driven them, have contributed to their success. Some people have spoken about their mom's as you have and your mom sounded like a formidable character, others have spoken about hard work, perseverance, can you elaborate on some of the key factors that have driven your success?</p>

MS CORNELIA SEPTEMBER	<p>I started off by talking about the collectivism in all of this, I've you know, I'm not where I am because I've done these things on my own. On a personal level there's the family structure and on a political level there are the organisations that I belong to. Of course the sense in South Africa that there was injustice in the country and that the majority of black people, whether they were called Xhosa, Ndebele, Zulu whether they speak Afrikaans like I speak Afrikaans, I grew up in an Afrikaans speaking home and in a community that was called "coloured" whether any of that, that drove you to the fact that there are people that need, that require that change needs to be brought about so whilst we have been able to politically free and liberate South Africa and its people, the drive now is that we cannot say that we have emancipated each and every aspect of this great and beautiful country and therefore when we talk about A luta continua it means that there are still many, much more that we need to do and so whilst that remains, whilst there are poor people still in the country there must be a drive of what do we do to make sure that people don't go to school hungry or get up the next morning and be hungry. I have taken a view that one of the things that we have to do in South Africa that we must get right, each one of us wherever we are is that we've got to get South African people educated. This link that Nelson Mandela speaks of that will take us out of poverty is something that we have to create in a much bigger revolution. Government has set aside a huge amount of money, education gets the bigger slice in the country and so it's the right commitment that government has but I think that there's much more that we can all do in the little way that we do. Education is not formally sitting in the classroom only, education is in very many different ways of how you can skill and up-skill people and so in my constituency what I've done was I looked at the figures that government produced and saw that we've got such a high amount of dropouts out of school. We've got such a high amount of young people who matriculate and boom, that's the end, nothing else. Our answer is government has made available funding and so there's a message that we have to get across to that parent and to the youth that it's not that nothing has been done, there's something that can be done, so I'm saying that this revolution that I'm talking about has to connect with all of these different things that can be done to take people through. The Cubans have done it, the people in Venezuela have done it, they've been able to bring down this literacy rate, the Cubans now can capacitate and educate and skill many people around this world, we too can do it.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Absolutely and without education there simply are no choices for people to go beyond what they know, it's a crucial function and factor.</p>
MS CORNELIA SEPTEMBER	<p>And so my challenge to the media is also what I've done in my constituencies I've brought these people to them, so for example I go to SAA and I said come to my constituency and show them there's an alternative skill that they can get involved in and great stuff they brought a simulator there and it was able to change the minds of that young person to what do I have to do, these subjects that I studied at school is maybe not the right thing and the immediate answer was that I can't go and do engineering and the answer immediately from the FET College was we can give you a bridge education and you can still become an engineer, even if you have those subjects, so I'm saying there are all</p>

	<p>those possibilities that can be done and we had some great success in the constituency when we did that we were able to break the mould of it is possible. I will never forget a youngster when one of the FET colleges said we've got bursaries that we can make available, can you help us to mobilise so we went to the school and we explained to the youngsters. I saw the fear in this child's eyes and I said to another lady let's stop what we are doing let's try and find out. We discovered that this young child is saying it is not possible for me to take this bursary and study further, I just come from Philippi I stay there, can I also from Philippi go and do that. We had to take a step back and say to him this is a free country, you also have the right, there are these possibilities for you also and he felt that he just stay in this small tiny shack those things are not meant for people like them to get involved and I'm saying that's part of the revolution that I'm talking about, that we have to break down and make sure that how it is possible at a particular level to bring down to our people and let everyone understand, even if I don't have a matric certificate, even if I did not go to school. My mother never matriculated, I matriculated, how is it possible that I matriculated from a mother that did not matriculate and so that sense, that understanding of how we change that mindset is something that is quite possible. Nelson Mandela was a herd boy, he became the president of this country, same too for Jacob Zuma, he became the president of this country.</p>
DR. MALKA	It doesn't matter where you come from what matters, is where you're going.
MS CORNELIA SEPTEMBER	Yes.
DR. MALKA	...and it's having the possibilities and making sure that you can have the opportunity to take advantage of them.
MS CORNELIA SEPTEMBER	<p>Yes absolutely, I want to say, my friend will not forgive me if I don't say this part. As part of what I said you can break down and bring into the in our instance in our constituencies, I even invited the ballet group and I made the link with them, I brought the Johannesburg Ballet Group and I worked very closely with them and what we were simply able to do is to say here is another skill that you can go into. The ability to do ballet enables you to get out of where you stay, you will be able to see another city, you will be able to see another province, you will be able to see another country, you will be able to see the rest of the world you will be able to acquire the following discipline and skills and stuff like that and I was amazed how they, when one of the dancers did the Dying Swan, I was amazed to see how they responded to it and said but we also want to do that and so I'm saying there are very many different forms and I've been able to do that, I still work with them. There's hope out there for many changes that we can bring about in this country and its people and in particular for women.</p>
DR. MALKA	Well I think the revolution that you are embarking on is fantastic, especially given the exposure of those different opportunities and possibilities to the youth.
MS CORNELIA SEPTEMBER	Yes.
DR. MALKA	We'll take a short break.
	AD BREAK
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DR. MALKA	Today we're talking to Ms Cornelia September better known as Connie September who is a former Trade Unionist and currently on the Magistrate Commission.
DR. MALKA	In closing our discussion could you please share a few words of wisdom, of inspiration that you'd like to impart to our young ladies listening on the continent?
MS CORNELIA SEPTEMBER	I think what is important is that the African continent find itself in one of the most exciting periods. A period of recognition, a period of that in Africa we do not have to apologise for who we are, that it is possible that from the womb and the belly of the African continent many great leaders were born, many thinkers were born and that we have been able to, we have enabled so many things to happen not only in our continent, in the world at large and so the confidence that I want to instil into young people out there, don't forget this past and this history, learn from it because it enables us to go forward but as we do go forward we understand where we come from and what needs to be done and I want to encourage them that yes it is nice to have a good life, yes it is great to have hip hop, it is nice, those things are not bad because we love them also but it's good to have priorities in life and it is good to understand and realise where do I want to be, where am I going to, what sacrifices am I prepared to make to go where I should be and what is it that I can contribute to make those changes that needs to be and what does it require from me and the sense of the collectiveness, collectivism that will enable me to do those things and education, education, education, for me is the most powerful weapon that can make all of that happen, it is the enabler it makes things possible it will take you around it is the aircraft, it is the ship, it is the car, education is that vehicle that will be able to bring about these changes for all of us. I am still educating myself as I speak now.
DR. MALKA	Thank you very much for sharing those words of wisdom and your personal perspectives and all of the learnings that you've given us today from having a recall remembering our history, utilising it as a foundation for the future and calling upon individuals to ask what they can do for themselves and also for their contribution to society, so thank you for joining us.
MS CORNELIA SEPTEMBER	Thank you to you and I absolutely have appreciated the moment, thank you again.
	PROGRAMME END