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PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: MS MARIE-ANTOINETTE ROSE QUATRE – HIGH COMMISSIONER OF THE SEYCHELLES TO THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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 Ms Marie Antoinette Rose Quatre who is the High Commissioner of the Seychelles to the Republic of South Africa, an archipelago of 115 islands in the Indian Ocean off East Africa for the population just shy of 100,000. Welcome to the show High Commissioner.
MS QUATRE	Good morning Dr. Malka, it's a pleasure to be here and thank you for having me.
DR. MALKA	We understand that you have recently become High Commissioner in South Africa so can you please share with us a few of the responsibilities that come with holding this role?
MS QUATRE	Dr. Malka when you become an ambassador then you represent your country in ...where...for me I'm representing Seychelles in South Africa and 11 other jurisdictions in Southern Africa. I'll also be representing the Seychelles at the Southern African Development Community, the SADC and the Current Market for Eastern and Southern Africa which is COMESA so basically I'll be looking after 11 countries and two big multilateral blocks.
DR. MALKA	That's a big portfolio, which are the other countries?
MS QUATRE	We've got...most of the countries in Southern Africa, the neighbouring countries of South Africa, so these are the countries that I'll be looking after. As an ambassador you've got really multiple roles, you have to have a relationship with the different countries that's at bilateral level and then you have to have a relationship with the multilateral blocks, mainly the SADC and COMESA but also you have the role of representation of Seychelle Nationals who are in the Southern African region. There's a growing number of Seychellois who are travelling now to South Africa, especially to South Africa and that's increasing quite a lot, so we do have a lot of consular matters that get reported to our office and now we're thinking about really expanding and looking at ways of engaging the Seychellois nation with Southern Africa, be it economic, social, for commerce or trade, there's a lot of opportunities for Seychelles to play a bigger role in Southern Africa.
DR. MALKA	And I was going to say I'd imagine that it's not just about vacationing but more in terms of emphasis on the commerce and the trade.
MS QUATRE	Ah that's increasing, that's increasing exponentially you won't believe, especially for the SME's we've realised recently that the small and medium businesses in Seychelles are really looking at Southern Africa as a potential market for their products but also for...to purchase materials from Southern Africa which is much cheaper than any other region in the world for their produce back home. So there's a lot of trade going on between Seychelles and the region.
DR. MALKA	And it's mutual benefit because you are taking components in...
MS. QUATRE	Oh yes definitely...

DR. MALKA	...as well as extending things out.
MS QUATRE	Exactly yes, and then you know Seychelles is only four hours...a four hour flight to Jo'burg...to Johannesburg from Victoria to Johannesburg and then we've recently got two weekly flights to Durban so that's also an increase in connectivity between the Seychelles and this part of the world.
DR. MALKA	And what would you say are going to be your biggest challenges in this role?
MS QUATRE	I..I...when I looked at this question I was wondering what challenges you know and I don't look at life in terms of challenges for me, there's a lot of opportunities. I think the biggest opportunity that's being missed between Seychelles and the region it's what we call people to people relations. You see we can have a lot of formal diplomatic ties, we can have a lot of agreements between nations, we can have a lot of forums where we can you know discuss, have really have a lot of discussions, we can really as an embassy work towards formal diplomatic relations but nothing beats people to people relations and that's really if we can achieve that, if we can have more of that then we will have a very solid footing in the region. When I look, for example at trade, we can only facilitate trade as governments, as multilateral blocks, we can only facilitate trade but trade can only happen really effectively when you have businesses coming together, becoming partners and really exploring the region for the purpose of their business but also for growth and development of the respective countries. We've also got a lot of exchanges, cultural exchanges between the Seychelles, we've got a wonderful cultural relation for example with South Africa, with Zambia, it's now expanding to Botswana and Tanzania and all the other countries in the region and these countries have got so much to offer and we can learn a lot in terms of culture and they also can learn a lot from a cultural perspective of what we have to offer, so we're really looking at that as a wonderful opportunity for, you know, our artists from all over the region to come together and celebrate our cultural identity. I put a lot of emphasis on cultural identity because if we lose that, as Africans then we lose.....we lose what we really have as a continent, so we really have to look at in the face of globalisation what are the challenges but what are also the opportunities that we really have to tap into and ensure that you know, fifty years down the road we haven't lost our identity, we haven't lost what we really are as Africans. So we're really putting a lot of emphasis on culture and cultural development and then we're also looking at people to people relations in terms of non-governmental organisations in terms of charity, in terms of really going out there and making people understand that you know the whole idea of coming together is for....not only for the benefit of one particular country but for the benefit of the whole. So these are the new areas that we are looking into in terms of a very small embassy because we will always have diplomatic ties, we've got wonderful relationships with other countries in the region but that's a new area where we're really looking into and exploring.
DR. MALKA	And I think that in the world that we're in today that connectivity becomes so much more important and the use of partnerships to help amplify because as you say, you are a small nation and the way to accelerate and grow progress is through partnerships with likeminded in order to make things happen and bring them to fruition.
MS QUATRE	Exactly, exactly.
DR. MALKA	Now our programme "Womanity – Women in Unity" is all about gender equality which is increasingly becoming a global focus and for me building female leadership capacity becomes vitally important for the future of women, not just within a country but across the continent and I'd say across the world

	and when I was reading up and doing my research on you I learned that you had been a member of the Women's Parliamentary Committee in your country, the Seychelles, from 2011 through to 2016 and thereupon you took on the role of High Commissioner to South Africa and 11 other countries within the region, which is a great honour, do you see the appointment of women ambassadors or high commissioners such as yourselves representing their country, correlating with the agenda of building female leadership?
MS QUATRE	When you become an ambassador Doctor then you become a child of the world. I look at this role more as yes, representing my country, but having a voice in the decision making process that world leaders are making, then at that level you can really influence or have a say in where the big decisions are being taken. Whether it's an agreement between two countries, for example when we will...if we have cooperation in terms of trade it's important to look at how women can benefit from trade or you can have a say at discussion levels in the big multilateral organisations, ensuring that women and other minority groups – when we talk about women we should also take into consideration other minority groups – then you can really become a voice for the voiceless.
DR. MALKA	'Cause often when we're talking about women there's almost this triple line that affects that going through from gender through to race and also as poverty as being this three line component.
MS QUATRE	Exactly, exactly, so when we talk about women....but also about...when we talk about gender in this day and age we should take into consideration that it's not just about women and men. We have LGBT groups, we have other minority groups that we should also take into consideration, if we leave them out then we are doing the same injustice that's been done to women to them so we have to take that into consideration as well. So when you become an ambassador then you can really come with a very strong voice on their behalf but also for me I really value the contribution of...you see the world tends to look at women in political leadership positions, it's fine, that's wonderful but we should not forget that leadership is not just about economic or political leadership. Leadership is at all sectors of society, it's about you know that auntie at home, you know, we've all got this very loud auntie in the house or in the family but they...for me this auntie has inspired me, that's for me is female leadership and we should really be talking about these people, or...
DR. MALKA	...and often she's the first person that a child is going to be seeing and forming those fundamental views.
MS QUATRE	Exactly so I think a lot of times we've been guilty of really focusing on women in political positions, which is very important when we are appointed as, you know, in high political positions or in high positions such as ambassadors or ministers or elected in office, in parliament, we should never forget that we represent also a voice of minority group or of a group that needs to be represented, we should never forget where we come from and we should never forget, like we say in Seychelles, we should never forget the struggle so to speak but also value these women who have not attained such high positions but who are also leaders in their own right and are much more influential in a lot of ways on other women but also on other men, other young boys you know in society.
DR. MALKA	I'm seeing a parallel from the earlier discussion when you were talking about trade almost as being an outcome but the importance of focusing on culture because that's the DNA that is driving it...
MS QUATRE	...that's...exactly...

DR. MALKA	...and now looking back into this environment where we're looking from a women's point of view, yes we have positions in leadership roles whether that's economic responsibility, political responsibility but the cultural piece doesn't go away and that's the piece that forms and informs society.
MS QUATRE	Exactly.
DR. MALKA	On that note do you think that as a society we're doing enough to encourage more women to take up positions where they can bring those lost voices or voices that are not necessarily loud enough because they're minority voices to the fore to bring about positive change to their communities?
MS QUATRE	I think the mistake we are making is focusing on just women to become that voice. I think we have to focus on men as well to become that voice. You see empowerment of women will only happen when men and women really understand the role of both genders in society, of all genders in society. I will stop using both genders now, I will say all genders of society, so we really have to focus I think a lot on yes female leadership, but how do we empower our young men in the communities, in the homes, to really understand and value the importance of young girls to begin with, young women, to respect their mothers, to respect their aunties, to respect their sisters and to respect their colleagues at work and to respect other women in society. If we focus only on the female voice we're missing half of the population which is also very important for them, even more important for them to understand their role alongside women. So no we're not doing enough because I think a lot of times us women we're talking for ourselves about ourselves, we're not talking to those who need to hear us, we're not talking with those, we're not having that narrative, that conversation with our male colleagues and a lot of times we also don't treat them as equals because we think they don't understand us but we haven't made the effort for them to understand us, for them to appreciate us and that will not happen with this generation Doctor, it will happen with the next generation when we as mothers, as big sisters in the families, as aunties begin to teach our young boys to start respecting women, to start valuing women and to start treating them as equals and not just women. Other minority groups, gays and lesbians and other you know transgender and other groups, disabled people, we have to start by teaching our young men, our young women to respect people who are different from us and this is where it begins. So I think we are missing that, we're not doing enough of that and when we are then in a position of influence like we are here, like other women are, we should really not focus on other positions of influence but use that influence to focus on that gap that exists and I think it's a big gap and I think to achieve what we want to achieve we have to fix society. Not just women, not just men but society as a whole.
DR. MALKA	It's a big call to action.
MS QUATRE	It is...yes....
DR. MALKA	...but ultimately it's having an appreciation of people, appreciation of diversity, that everybody has a place and it's a place of equalness.
MS QUATRE	Exactly.
DR. MALKA	Whilst we're on the topic of women and gender, we know that we're not there yet but the reality is that a lot has been achieved in terms of driving that progression....
MS QUATRE	...yes...
DR. MALKA	...do you think that 50/50 representation across the board is attainable and when I say 50/50 I know that we've been talking about different gender groupings but in this context....
MS QUATRE	...yes it is for women...

DR. MALKA	...looking at getting for women?
MS QUATRE	...and it's not just 50/50 Dr. Malka, it's 50/50 by 2030, so this is a big call, a big call for action...
DR. MALKA	...13 years away....
MS QUATRE	...13 years away and I'm sure both of us will still be alive. I don't think it will happen by just putting...just putting a number, a figure to a date, it's not going to happen and by just pressing for that it's not going to happen, I'll tell you why it's not going to happen the way we're doing it. We can have affirmative action; a lot of people are for or against affirmative action. We can drive gender parity through legislation; that is fine we can do that. We can have for example like we have in a lot of African countries Quarter System for equal representation in parliament for example but we need to have concerted effort at another level entirely that's not focusing on figures but focusing on independence of individuals, that's focusing on empowerment and when we talk about empowerment we have to talk about education - number one - it's very important, you cannot empower women to reach 50/50 by 2030 if you are not giving them the opportunity to be educated to reach the highest level they can reach...they can attain. You have to have basic healthcare available to them because a lot of times women who do not get access to proper healthcare, they fall through the cracks of society and that's happening in almost all countries in the region. You have to give them basic needs, the basic needs that they need to have but also respect the fundamental rights that they have as individuals. So yes we can talk about big figures and have proper legislation which I'm all in favour for, but we really need to focus on empowerment and it can only happen when we focus on empowerment of both genders, of all genders, but with particular focus on women because we want to achieve 50/50 by 2013; that's only 13 years away like you've said.
DR. MALKA	As we've been talking I've been thinking that sometimes we may be looking at this in the wrong way. We almost think 50/50 and we have this ceiling, this capacity of where the world is now, but the reality is if you look at the different types of jobs, the different types of innovations that are happening, that we can create more than what we have now, in which case there will be space for more people to come into, so many more opportunities from an entrepreneurship....
MS QUATRE	Exactly, exactly. For example, I'll give you an example, we can really achieve 50/50 in political representation in parliament if we have a quota system, but is a quota system the best system for representation?
DR. MALKA	...I think it puts...it allows...it gives a ticket to the game.
MS QUATRE	...it gives a ticket to the game but in Seychelles we don't have a quota system...
DR. MALKA	...and how's..
MS QUATRE	...and up until the last elections we had reached 45%, up until the last elections, I think it's down to maybe less than 20% - I don't have the exact figure - because you have also to look at representation in terms of people's choice. It's a real choice...
DR. MALKA	...it's a people's choice and sometimes there's also complacency because if you go we've hit 45 we've only got 5 to go and if we don't put enough effort in it shows, you've got to keep at it the whole time.
MS QUATRE	But also you can have – and I've experienced that – and I think we have to be very careful. You can have a lot of men representing a lot of women much better than women representing themselves, us women sometimes we do harm to the process...
DR. MALKA	...can you explain that?
MS QUATRE	When we reach a certain level, when we attain a certain level of leadership

	<p>we have to lead as women, we have to lead so that other women see in us real leadership and we have to lead to inspire. If we don't inspire the rest then that will not anchorage other young women to take up political office so I think we have to be careful in terms of just having a mere number, just a quota, just a lot you know of voices. When we speak we have to speak passionately, we have to do things passionately, we have to make things happen, we have to drive it but not just in the house of parliament, not just in the chambers, you know, so that our voters can hear us, it has to happen in the communities, it has to happen back where we were elected, you see, so this has to happen at....I'm talking because I'm a former member of parliament, I'm talking as a parliamentarian but this has to happen at all levels of leadership you know, in the church, in the business sector, we have to lead to inspire and if we don't inspire we cannot expect a hand out so to speak, we cannot expect society to just you know give us that ticket, we have to also to earn that ticket and inspire other people to earn that ticket. I think this is where you will have, not just because for me 50/50 is quantitative but we have to look at the qualitative side as well. What sort of quality of women do we need in society and that...it's very sensitive but it's a frank and honest discussion that we need to have.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Well I think leaders are the people that communities aspire to become. They represent society in a way and in fact I'd say they represent their ideology of society that you can aspire to, subscribe to their values and want to emulate.</p>
MS QUATRE	<p>Exactly.</p>
DR.MALKA	<p>You are listening to "Womanity – Women in Unity" on Channel Africa, the African perspective on frequency 9625 KHz, on the 31 meter band, also available on DSTV, Channel 802. Today we're talking to Ms Marie-Antoinette Rose Quatre who is the High Commissioner of the Seychelles to the Republic of South Africa and another 11 nations in Sub-Sahara. We would love to receive your comments on Twitter:@WomanityTalk.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>High Commissioner we've spoken about women, we've spoken about culture, we've spoken about society and I'd like to raise an issue which I think many women still contend with and that is that they find themselves torn between traditional and cultural expectations as women, as mothers and yet trying to fulfil their personal needs, professional aspirations in modern society, what would your advice be to women in managing that dynamic?</p>
MS QUATRE	<p>I think managing that dynamic comes with an internal factor of understanding that you have to have balance in life. We spend half of our lives in the work place and half at home so both spheres are very important for growth and development, personal growth and development but I think the challenge - you were talking about challenge – the challenge for a lot of women is the imbalance that exists between the public sphere. A lot of them achieve a lot in the public sphere because out there in the public sphere they're very much on their own you know, this is what they want, this is what they want to achieve but when it comes to the private sphere then there are other influences, the family, the traditions, the support of their partners and a lot of women are still struggling to be recognised and appreciated as an equal partner in the private sphere. I've seen in my lifetime a lot of women in a position of power in the workplace but at home they are still mistreated there's still a lot of domestic violence, there's still a lot of abuse, physical, emotional abuse by their partners and sometimes by the family and there's still a lot of pressure by the community for them to stick to their traditions, which is fine if they want to, but to stick to some elements of...in terms of tradition that they may not want to, so they're still – and this is what I was talking about by empowering communities, by</p>

	making also communities understand the importance of supporting the growth and development of women...but...
DR. MALKA	...and culture can evolve, it's not static.
MS QUATRE	...and culture can...exactly it's not static it can evolve but it can only...it will only, only happen when...I keep saying that because for me there lies a problem and there lies a solution...it can only happen when we teach our children to respect their sisters, to respect their mothers. If a child is growing up in a home where there is domestic violence, irrespective of the fact of whether the mother has achieved so much, we are teaching that child that it's okay to beat up a woman and we are impacting negatively on the mindset of the next generation so come next fifty years we will be dealing with the same issues so I think the...we have to talk about the private sphere and a lot of women do not want to talk, we sometimes we don't want to talk about the challenges in the private sphere, in the private homes because it's very private, it's the things that we want to keep to ourselves. If we want to make the change, we have to become the change we want to see so I think this is a challenge but I also see another challenge in the workplace. Sometimes a lot of women we think we need to lead by becoming a man. We have to accept the fact that our leadership style will be different and that we are different from men, we are not the same, we are women, they are men, we are physically and probably psychologically engineered differently and that is not a weakness, that is a strength, we have to recognise that our difference is a strength. I don't have to emulate my male colleagues to be on par with them, I have to have my own style of leadership and I've seen a lot of my colleagues leading from the heart you know and a lot of people have seen that as a weakness, this is not a weakness, this is a strength. I was not born like men; I was born to be a woman but to be a leader.
DR. MALKA	I will never forgetthat one of our former police commissioners she said, she said "I don't want to be a second class man, I want to be a first class woman."
MS QUATRE	Exactly, exactly so we have to be a first class woman than a second class man so I think she's got it spot on and I think that sort of narrative has to continue, that sort of language has to continue.
DR.MALKA	Now turning more towards a personal perspective, it's one of the questions that I ask all my guests who have made tremendous achievements in their respective disciplines and it's about the factors that have contributed to their success and the reason I ask this question is that sometimes I think people see you here as the High Commissioner but the reality is that you didn't take this position overnight, it took years of hard work to get to this role, so if you could please share with us some of the factors behind your success or elements that you think have contributed to it, I think our listeners would appreciate it?
MS QUATRE	Yes, I think for me one of the factors has been the passion for work but also the respect that you give other people. You cannot lead without respecting others and treat people as equals you know. I was just thinking about this question this morning, throughout my career I am a woman, I am a black woman and I am a young women so I belong to three sort of minority groups, you know, disadvantaged groups and all throughout my life I've gained respect of people you know, I've had the respect of others and I think if I was to describe my career throughout in one word that would be respect. Respect earned, respect given to me and respect that in turn I have to give to others.
DR. MALKA	And growing up can you share with us some of the pivotal moments in your life which have formed who you are today?

MS QUATRE	I think there are two things that have shaped me. One is a person and one is perhaps now looking back over the last perhaps 30 years of my life, I think it's growing up poor. You know growing up with having to share with others, growing up knowing that there may not be enough to share or you have to give to others. Growing up having to make a lot of sacrifice and seeing your parents making a lot of sacrifice so that you can get the best education, so that you can get ahead in life. So this is something that really has shaped the way I think I look at the world and I want to influence the world in a big way and this is growing up with not having enough is something that should be cherished and talked about, it is not a point of shame in somebody's life because out there there are other people going through that and they should see in you that element, that level of inspiration to say aha, I can go there, I can reach that level as well so I think for me it's growing up making a lot of sacrifice along the way and not having sort of a silver spoon, you know, in my mouth and having to really earn everything along the way, but also having people in my life who have really influenced me. I know two women who have really influenced and that is one aunty who's passion and political activism really influenced me in a big way but I remember one time in my childhood when my mother and my father were not working and she fed us, she cared for us and for me you grow up never forgetting that kind of leadership, that kind of passion, that kind of you know wanting to help other people and then there's another lady who really influenced me in a big way because when I earned a scholarship, I didn't want to take that scholarship and I told my friends, my mum you know, I want to work, I want to start working and earning some money and I remember she called me and I remember it was the 3 rd January 1995 and she said you will waste your future away, you will throw it away if you don't take that scholarship and I'm talking to you as an aunty, as a big sister, as a mother, please make the right decision but this is what I'm saying about.....
DR. MALKA	...I'm getting goosebumps as we speak because the challenges as a young person you do not have that foresight....
MS QUATRE	...yes...
DR. MALKA	...and she had it...
MS QUATRE	...she had it...
DR. MALKA	...and she was right...
MS QUATRE	...and she was right but we need that kind of people, I have to become that kind of person now to another woman, another man, another person. I haven'tI have to become that aunty, you know, and not becoming that is failing those who have helped me along the way and is failing the very society I want to change, I want to make things happen.
DR. MALKA	Now turning towards the working side of life, you've built a professional career which has stretched across media, communication, politics, from being a reporter in the Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation to editor and head of communications, member of the National Assembly, leader of government business in your country and now High Commissioner. Can you share with us a few of the landmarks in your career and when you understood that serving your country would be such a big part of your destiny?
MS QUATRE	I will answer your question in a bit of a round-about way Dr. Malka. First I wanted to be a lawyer, really wanted to be a lawyer and I set my heart and mind to being a lawyer and then suddenly I became a journalist and then I saw myself becoming a politician and it didn't occur to me until much later in my life that all three careers all I wanted to do was represent somebody else. I wanted to become the voice of the voiceless, I wanted to

	become the voice of somebody who couldn't speak for him or herself, I wanted to make a lot of noise, I wanted to be heard, I suppose I had so many things I wanted to say and so many things I wanted to do.
DR.MALKA	It's a big responsibility.
MS QUATRE	It's a big responsibility because you have to have balance, you have to live in a very responsible way but all I think now looking back all I've ever wanted to do is represent, represent society, represent the voiceless, those who need to be represented.
DR. MALKA	High Commissioner we are unfortunately running out of time...
MS QUATRE	...yes...
DR. MALKA	...can I please ask you in closing out our conversation today to share a few words of inspiration which you would like to pass on to the women in Africa that are listening to our show today?
MS QUATRE	I have a personal mantra that I want to share and that's from Aristotle and he says "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence is not an act but a habit" this sort of personal mantra has really shaped me into the person I am. If we do not become what we want or you know when he says you are what you repeatedly do, every single day matters, it's not just about giving an interview, it's going out there and seeing somebody needing help and actually making it happen, if we can making it happen to that person. It's going to church and helping in the community, it's going to the schools and helping out, it's talking to young people, but on every day level, it cannot be cosmetic. What we are cannot be cosmetic and if we want to excel at something, for those who want really passionately want to excel at something, excellence is not an act, it's not something...it's not a thesis that you write and then you achieve, it's not a certificate that you get you know, it's not a sort of a medal that you get, it is a habit, it becomes you. Excellence becomes you and you become what you repeatedly do.
DR. MALKA	I think that's an incredibly important message and also the context that you gave around it in practicing excellence as a habit. Thank you so much for being on the show today it's been wonderful having you on the programme.
MS QUATRE	It's been a pleasure and I'm really very happy that you've invited me to the programme, it's given me the chance to really address some of the issues that I'm very passionate about and I'm sure those listening will hopefully take a bit out of the programme and you know, run away with it, take it, it's yours.
DR. MALKA	Thank you very much
MS QUATRE	Thank you.
PROGRAMME END	