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PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: MS RUCHIRA KAMBOJ – HIGH COMMISSIONER OF INDIA TO SOUTH AFRICA AND KINGDOM OF LESOTHO

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 in Pretoria is the High Commissioner of India to South Africa as well as the Kingdom of Lesotho; Ms Ruchira Kamboj who joined the Indian Foreign Service in 1987, celebrating three decades of service this year. Her career has included postings to France, Mauritius, New York, London as well as South Africa; she has represented India in the United Nations, UNESCO as well as embassies. Welcome to the show!
HC KAMBOJ	Thank you so much I am delighted to be here.
DR. MALKA	We are happy to have you here and I believe that you are no stranger to South Africa in your official capacity; first in 1997 on a state visit, then again serving as India's Consul General in Cape Town between 2006 to 2009 and now as High Commissioner of Indian to the Republic of South Africa and Lesotho. Can you share with us a little bit more about what your role entails in your capacity as High Commissioner?
HC KAMBOJ	Yes thank you very much Doctor, needless to say I'm delighted to be here in this very special show, which really celebrates women I think, which I think is wonderful. As far as my role here as the High Commissioner of India to South Africa is concerned, my work is to grow the relationship between our two countries to the benefit of our two countries and people, as well as to look for new opportunities where we can develop new synergies, again to the benefit of our two countries and people.
DR. MALKA	And when you look at that in terms of benefits, are we talking culture, are we talking trade, political aspects?
HC KAMBOJ	Yes we're talking all of that and more. When I talk about growing the relationship you engage at the very highest levels between the two countries so there has been a very regular exchange of visits between the President of South Africa and the Prime Minister of India, including the Prime Minister of India's visit last year to South Africa. We're talking of course of trade and commerce and investment and I'm happy to say that this is a fairly robust partnership. We're talking about cultural exchanges, very substantive exchanges as in training, skills, capacity building, Indians going to South Africa on exchange and South Africans going to India, which actually happens quite a lot. We're talking about science for development, we're talking about a defence engagement; we are talking about people to people contacts. As you know South Africa has amongst the largest Diaspora's; close to two million and I think this is also a very strong link, a very strong thread that links our two countries together; so when I talk about growing the relationship to the benefit of our two countries and people, I'm talking about the entire gamut; political, economic, culture, trade, science, defence, people and much, much more.
DR. MALKA	It sounds like it's going to be a very full portfolio. Are there any particular milestones that you want to accomplish during your tenure?

HC KAMBOJ	Well since the question is so specific I think I can be specific also; I think it will be the effort and endeavour of me and my team to grow the economic and commercial partnership in these three years that I am going to be here and to double it in the next five years, as was set out in the joint declaration that was released upon conclusion of the state visit of the Prime Minister of India to South Africa in 2016.
DR. MALKA	Well that is a wonderful task and when I look at it in terms of populations, I mean already India have 1.3 billion people...
HC KAMBOJ	...that's right...
DR. MALKA	...compared to South Africa's 52 or I think we're up to 54 million...
HC KAMBOJ	...yes, yes, that's right...
DR. MALKA	...paltry in comparison but that's a fantastic opportunity to double. One of the things that has struck me is that in our world today we operate in such a globally connected society; can you expand on some of the more significant collaborations or projects that you're working on with your counterparts in other countries in Africa?
HC KAMBOJ	Yes indeed. If you look at Africa there is a great need, if I may say so, to enhance skills and to enhance the training and the skills of the people of this continent, so to that end the government of India runs a programme called The Indian Technical and Economic Co-Operation Programme, not just in South Africa but across all the countries in Africa, me and my colleagues work on this programme which is completely sponsored by the government of India; taking South Africans, using the South African context, to India, about 80 to 100 slots to India skilling them, training them in sectors where this will be beneficial to the country and let me tell you something, when these young men and ladies come back to South Africa, I've met some of them already in these three months and they say that this has been the most incredible experience, game changing; one - not only do they acquire the skills set; two – they engage and understand the culture of another country and serve thereby as you know bridge builders between our two countries and third and very interestingly, when they go to India and train, they train in an environment where there are many other African colleagues so they develop a network with African colleagues when they come back to South Africa and they say that this is really a hugely fulfilling and rewarding experience. So you train, you skill, you build a network and you understand and engage with a country and thereby you build bridges of friendship and understanding, so, I think this is something me and my colleague ambassadors across Africa engage actively in and I think....and I hope that this programme will continue to grow and be useful to South Africa and Africans.
DR. MALKA	I'm sure it will be, it sounds fantastic and all of those collaborative efforts as well as the sustained effects, not just in terms of the skills, but the networking which will happen and last a lifetime....
HC KAMBOJ	...absolutely...
	...as networks do. There seems to be an increasing feminisation of government services around the world and a strong emergence of female diplomats and I know if you look at your colleagues in South Africa, there's an abundance of lady ambassadors and high commissioners; in your opinion why do you think this is?
HC KAMBOJ	Well to be very honest you know I feel that you know every thought process has a time and to my mind this is really the time for women and as they say "this is an idea whose time has come" and that is why, possibly, you're seeing so much of this, you're... we're talking more about empowerment, we're talking more about women....equality of women and we're seeing

	more and more women in public life and indeed doing fantastic jobs, no matter what sector this is.
DR. MALKA	And you've had an opportunity to work in many different countries which are... some are more progressive to an extent and others to a lesser extent regarding women's empowerment; in....based on your observations which one's do you think are more effectively addressing gender inequalities and what lessons could we possibly take from them to ensure that more countries get onto the right path?
HC KAMBOJ	Well let me give you the example of my own country, India, and just to highlight that India really has come out very strongly in the forefront as far as women and empowerment of women is concerned; just two very quick examples if I may. Number one; we have a flagship programme of the government of India which is "Educate the Girl Child; Save the Girl Child". This was launched by the Prime Minister of India in 2014/2015 and this programme really has been a game changer. So across the country you're spreading the good word, spreading information, creating awareness, you know you have appointed you know role models who are going out and spreading the message and I think this is really making a huge difference because it's also important to talk. Talking should not be underestimated and I think that this programme is a wonderful flagship programme of the government which talks about the issue and which actions also on ground and number two; let me tell you something that is very contextual; in rural India we had identified that many girls dropped out of school simply because the schools in rural areas did not have adequate infrastructure for girls, as in toilets. Now for many developed countries this may seem absurd, but in a developing country context, if after a certain age there aren't toilets in schools, then girls invariably drop out. So in the last two/three years there was a massive campaign and there have been...I can't even tell you the numbers, there have been so many toilets that have been constructed that actually the drop-out rate of girls in the rural areas has come down considerably, so that is another example of how targeting a weakness, you can really bring about a significant improvement in a situation that you face on the ground. Then, in my own country I mean, I must add that we have so many women in leading positions; the defence minister of India is a woman; the foreign minister of India is a woman; the information and broadcasting minister of India is a woman; the speaker of parliament, the.....is a lady; we've had a former president who's been a lady, a prime minister whose been a lady, so, you know you have it on both fronts, the negatives and the positives. The negatives are important because you have to highlight the problem and then you attack the problem; the positives, the role models are equally important because that is when you can actually, through inspiration, change mindsets.
DR. MALKA	And besides all of the leadership roles that you've mentioned in your country, I mean we've also got Indra Nooyi from PepsiCo, so it
HC KAMBOJ	...yes of course...yes, yes yes...so many actually....
DR. MALKA	...so it just shows that goes globally and not just contained on a national level...
HC KAMBOJ	...absolutely and you have named just one of them; she's very, very well known, Indra Nooyi, but there are many other hugely successful women entrepreneurs doing a marvellous job and somehow making it all happen. The millions of roles that women play, they're playing them all very successfully; there are absolutely wonderful women in India.
DR. MALKA	And whilst we're on the topic of role models, I think that female role models are really important in society because they are sources of influence in the way that

	women perceive themselves but also how they identify and understand what opportunities are available to them and I think almost more importantly I would say it is how men perceive women because in the past with leadership roles they've been traditionally occupied by men and when you see a man as the image you think that that is the type of persona...
HC KAMBOJ	...yes, yes....
DR. MALKA	...that should be occupying those roles...
HC KAMBOJ	...absolutely...
DR. MALKA	...but when you can see women achieving this I think that it has great foundations for both men and for women.
HC KAMBOJ	...totally, I agree with you. Absolutely.
DR. MALKA	So I understand that there are a couple of things that are fairly topical, one; there is a travelling photograph exhibition called 'Women Changing India' which highlights the vital role that women play in India today and I believe they were in Johannesburg in October and are going around the world; can you....
HC KAMBOJ	...yes, yes...
DR. MALKA	...tell us more?
HC KAMBOJ	No I think you're absolutely right, this is a wonderful initiative. This has been sponsored by Bonk Paribas and I commend and congratulate them for taking up such a topical cause. This exhibition is currently playing in Johannesburg; I inaugurated it on 30th October, I was delighted to do so, as I said this was one event that I could not have resisted. This is photography; a travelling photography exhibition, magnum photography, so you can imagine the quality and the images are absolutely amazing. This exhibition has of course played out in India, in Europe, it's now come to South Africa and I believe that after South Africa it will move to the Middle East to Bahrain. What is really very unique about this exhibition, as you rightly say, it highlights the vital role that women play in Indian society, these are not celebrities or famous people, these are people just like you and me, anybody who has excelled and the many, many roles that we play. You could be a doctor, you could be an engineer, you could be just movie maker, you could be a broadcaster, you could be a diplomat; you could be just a very enterprising entrepreneur at a very basic level. So you're showcasing women in their various shades and these could be rural women, these are modern women, these are city slickers, so it shows the various shades of Indian women and what a long journey we have come; it's been a long way and today how well some of us are doing and tomorrow I am confident that given the chances, the opportunities, the great work that is being done by everybody concerned, it won't be long before I think times will hopefully change.
DR. MALKA	I couldn't agree with you more. And another example is of the all women India crew who are sailing the naval vessel Tarini; successfully in their first leg they navigated 5000 nautical miles in 42 days to Australia and I believe the ladies will be making their way through to Cape Town for the second leg but only reaching us in February 2018; can you tell us more about some of the objectives for undertaking this epic journey?
HC KAMBOJ	Yes I think this is truly an incredible feat and needs to be highlighted. These young ladies, six sailor's average age of 26, are circumnavigating the globe, they were flagged off from Goa, India in October by India's defence minister, also a woman, and they will be touching four shores. They have already touched Australian shores, they're on their way to New Zealand, Falklands and finally Cape Town, South Africa as you mentioned, circumnavigating the globe in just 165 days; very exacting standards and they are out to create history. I think this needs to be highlighted, there is

	<p>enormous symbolism here and we are walking the talk actually and we are so proud that it is to India that this onus falls; that six young women are creating history. Now these are young women drawn from various walks of life, none of them are from particularly privileged backgrounds, they have worked their way to where they are and that, is I think, such an important message. They exemplify the grit and determination of the modern Indian women, they remind us that gender does not define potential and they I think underscore the fact that nothing is impossible for a woman. So we're very proud of this feat, if I may say so, and we're greatly looking forward to welcoming them to Cape Town, we will get them to engage with various personalities of course, but what I would really like is for them to engage with young girls, school students, so that you know they serve to remind these young girls, as you said you know, who have got so used to seeing a man doing certain jobs that no, women too can do these jobs and as I always say the secret weapon is that this sailing ship Tarini', the mast of the ship was made by Southern Spars, Cape Town, so India and South Africa are bonded in this very remarkable voyage.</p>
DR. MALKA	That ties totally into the all of the cultural aspects that you're doing...
HC KAMBOJ	..very much so...
DR. MALKA	...as part of your role combining the two societies, linking them close together and I think also on the Diaspora aspect, not just of Indian women doing it for themselves in India, but in terms of all the different ports that they visit...
HC KAMBOJ	...absolutely...
DR.MALKA	...to demonstrate what women can do for those different unique communities...
HC KAMBOJ	...absolutely...
DR. MALKA	You are listening to 'Womanity – Women in Unity' on Channel Africa, the African Perspective, on frequency 9625 KHz, on the 31 meter band and we're talking to the High Commissioner of India to South Africa and Lesotho, Ms Ruchira Kamboj.
	AD BREAK
DR. MALKA	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 the High Commissioner of India to South Africa and Lesotho, Ruchira Kamboj. We would love to receive your comments on Twitter: @WomanityTalk.
DR. MALKA	In the previous segment of the show the High Commissioner spoke about the complexities of her role in terms of addressing specifically economic aspects as well as cultural aspects, partnering with bilateral relations between the different countries that she's working with, South Africa, Lesotho and obviously India. We spoke about the importance of role modelling, reflected on some of the key activities that are underway with India, for example the photograph exhibition called 'Women Changing India' as well as the all female Indian crew sailing the naval vessel Tarini.
DR. MALKA	High Commissioner whilst we're talking about gender one of the things which struck me and I have to say unfortunately, is that very recently the World Economic Forum released their latest Global Gender Gap Report for 2017; it monitors equality gaps across four different dimensions so one is economic participation on opportunity; two—educational attainment; three—health and survival and fourth – political empowerment. Although the educational gap is closing and I'm really pleased to see that, that it will be 13 years and you've for instance mentioned the flagship programme in India about educating girls. Since the 2016 report the overall gap though is increasing and one of the principles of weakness are within the economic space and the political space, which at this rate is expected to close at 217 years and 99 years respectively;

	none of us are going to be around if that happens in that timeframe. Legislation and quotas are a couple of interventions to accelerate progress, but they've been in place but yet we're not seeing the traction; in your opinion what do you think we can do to help close those gaps more effectively?
HC KAMBOJ	Shew well you know first of all you know I'd like to make the point that change doesn't come easy and change doesn't come as quick as we would like change to happen. Let's not forget that women have been held back for centuries, so to turn the clock around it is going to time, it is an enormous task and it's not going to be so easy because all of us are at varying levels of development. Also I would like to emphasise that you know change is not linear; change can be zigzagged, it can be two steps forward, one step back, so let's give this time, even as we are at it and the second point that I would like to make is this whole thing about statistics and figures. Of course statistics and figures are very critical and they are revealing to an extent, but sometimes you know the subtle nuances are not caught by the statistics. Let me give you a very basic example and again I will turn to my own country, India, just to demonstrate that change is round the corner. You know in India sometimes there are matrimonial inserted into newspapers, you know, where I think quite often still you know, boys look for girls, you know. Now if you really look at those advertisements I would say 90% ask for a working woman...
DR. MALKA	...a working woman...?
HC KAMBOJ	...working woman, you know there are various things you can...
DR. MALKA	...your criteria...
HC KAMBOJ	...your criteria; who would you like as a spouse, I would say 90% now demand and ask and prefer a working girl, so isn't that itself a sign of the changing times? So none of this will be caught by statistics, so change is happening, it is round the corner, it is slow, it is not linear. Several times you know there is an incredible story to tell like Tarini and there're sometimes not good stories to tell, that's how it happens. So I would say the picture is not dismal, it's not as abysmal as the statistics make them out to be. I think that change is happening, it will take time and a lot of it is there, scratch the surface and you see that it is happening all the time, so let's be at it, that's my message, let's continue the good job, let's continue this beautiful journey.
DR. MALKA	A point well taken and the challenge also when they aggregate statistics you can have very low performing countries which pull down the performance of the top performers.
HC KAMBOJ	Ja and if I may add, you know for example in India today I think, especially the younger generation; let's talk about the younger generation, the future belongs to them. I do not know many or any younger generation of Indian women who would not like to do anything with their lives. Every parent of this younger generation wants to educate the girl child, wants to give her a chance, an opportunity to soar, to fly, which is why you see these incredible performers in India. As I said the crew of Tarini the average age is just 26....
DR. MALKA	...very young...
HC KAMBOJ	...in a sector where hitherto only men have dared, so I think the world is changing, certainly India is changing very rapidly and the younger generation that we talk about, including in the rural areas. Everybody wants to get out there, study, work, emancipate and live an equal life.
DR. MALKA	Now turning more towards a personal perspective; you've held diverse roles in different countries including being India's Chief of Protocol, Deputy Head at the Office of Secretary General at the Common Wealth Secretariat in London,

	<p>Counsellor to India’s permanent mission to the United Nations in New York between 2002 to 2005 where you dealt with a wide range of political issues including UN Peacekeeping, UN Security Council Reform, First Secretary for Economic and Commercial Aspects and Head of Chancery at the Indian High Commission in Mauritius; these are not conventionally female roles, how do you think women occupying roles of leadership influence firstly younger women to consider non-typical positions as viable career options, and secondly to help overcome the stereotypical thinking that society has in terms of what roles it considers women should occupy and what they can accomplish?</p>
HC KAMBOJ	<p>Ja I think that’s an excellent question and it’s a very important question. I do believe that you know in this journey it is very, very important to highlight the negatives and the positives. The negatives of course because you cannot tackle a problem ‘till you bring it out and bring it out in the open and then you go about focusing and finding solutions, but we are not talking about negatives, I think now we are talking about positives. The positives are equally important and this is where I think women achievers, women who are, you know, who have pushed the boundaries, it is very, very important to bring out these examples in the public eye so that, as you yourself said at the outset of the programme, young girls you know who have got so used to over a period in time to seeing just men occupying those positions can imagine themselves as doing those jobs one day. So the importance of role models and positive images, the symbolism is absolutely critical and I think we should do more of it, we should do both the negatives and the positives as we continue in our journey.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>We need more Tarini’s...</p>
HC KAMBOJ	<p>Yes, we need more Tarini’s and I’m sure India will produce many more, as will the world.</p>
DR MALKA	<p>Can you share with us a little bit about some of the gender challenges that you’ve experienced and have managed to overcome during your career?</p>
HC KAMBOJ	<p>Well I will be honest here; there could be biases, there could be assumptions about the roles that women can play and I really believe that you know there goes a saying that you have to work twice as hard to be considered half as good, so let me give you one tiny example. When I was given the position of Chief of Protocol of the Government of India, which was hitherto only a male bastion, so there was this assumption “can you do this job?” “Would you be able to keep the long hours?” and “It’s a very tough job so would you be able to do it?” and I said “of course” and ironically, and I salute her, the person who picked me for the job was a lady, she was the foreign secretary of India at that time and she had the vision and she felt that time had come for a lady to don this mantle and to just do a very good job and I often find that there are assumptions made about women that you know a woman cannot do a tough job, a woman cannot keep long hours and what I say is sure, it could be the case, in cases of certain women but that is entirely their prerogative but do not assume that for women in general; let...give them a chance and let them prove themselves and let me give you a very tiny example. I stepped down from that job when I was posted as Ambassador to UNESCO in 2014, April, and within a month I was recalled again to Deli to organise the entire protocol and logistics of the Prime Minister’s swearing in ceremony where approximately 10 heads of state and government had come in, so I went down and did that job and I returned to Paris to assume my job as Ambassador to UNESCO and just saying it, I mean since you’ve asked me the question, the media ran several stories and the gist was that “she was called because she was the toughest and the best”. So I rest my case.</p>

DR. MALKA	Fantastic and it goes back to that whole point on assumptions, never...never assume...
HC KAMBOJ	...yes, don't assume, give the woman a chance, let her decide whether she wants to do that so-called tough job or not.
DR. MALKA	And I think that also talks to the fact that as humans we have these preconditioned ideas of what people can do and we box them into these little nice pigeon holes...
HC KAMBOJ	...pigeon holes, absolutely...
DR. MALKA	...which in reality; is not the case at all...
HC KAMBOJ	...ja absolutely, I agree with you totally.
DR. MALKA	And on that vain what would be your advice to women who find themselves torn between traditional and cultural expectations, so what I mean by that is apart from having the opportunities in place of wanting to advance, excel, have a career, we also have to contend with the issue of being mothers, of raising families and that does provide tension and also conflict?
HC KAMBOJ	No absolutely, I couldn't agree with you more with you, I think many women, all of us have been torn apart, we've been wrenched between you know the office and the home-front and this is undeniable and you know we play various roles as you say; we are professionals, we are wives, we are mothers and every time you play less of a role in any of these areas it takes a toll in your life. So that is the eternal conflict, it's not going to be easy going forward but what I would say is that each woman has to find that balance, that golden balance in her life and that balance is different for every woman. It's different from me to you and further on, so I think the key is that even as you do all this, find that balance in your life and it is for you to decide what that balance is.
DR. MALKA	Yes no-one else can because as you say we're all unique.
HC KAMBOJ	Yes, absolutely.
DR. MALKA	One of the questions that I ask all my guests on this show who've made tremendous achievements within their respective fields of expertise is about the factors that they consider to have contributed to their success. Some people speak about hard work; others talk about perseverance or particular people who've had an impact on them; can you share with us what have been some of the key drivers that you consider have contributed to your success?
HC KAMBOJ	I think it's very simple. Have a dream, that's 50% of the journey and then it's very simple after that, just work hard. Work hard and you will get lucky.
DR. MALKA	Work hard and you will get lucky; I think that's going to be my new meme for the moment. Can you please share with us some of the pivotal moments in your life growing up?
HC KAMBOJ	Yes definitely I see...looking back I think there was this very pivotal moment in my life; I lost my father when I was 16, I was very young and through my grief and pain I saw my mother's grief and pain and I was absolutely determined to not let her down and it was actually simple for me because she had already given me the dream much before. The dream to be what I do today and I just had to work hard and I think that was the turning point moment in my life when I saw my mother's grief and I had this...what should I say...the compassion in me that I will not let my mother down, I think that was the turning point moment, the dream was already there, I'm grateful to her for that and as I said I just had to work hard and by God's grace I did make it.
DR. MALKA	You have indeed and I mean you've had a wonderful career thus far.
HC KAMBOJ	Thank you.

DR. MALKA	Can you share with us what influenced you during your years of growing up?
HC KAMBOJ	You know this might sound clichéd but it has to be my mother. I am a single parent child and I have been greatly influenced by mother’s strength, simplicity and honesty...
DR.MALKA	...strength, simplicity and honesty...
HC KAMBOJ	...and I would like to believe that I embody all of that.
DR. MALKA	I think those are wonderful values to have and to perpetuate. And lastly, as we close out the conversation today, could you share a few words of wisdom or inspiration that you’d like to impart to young women listening to us?
HC KAMBOJ	Ja you know I honestly feel that you know women think that they are vulnerable and women think sometimes maybe that they are weak, but my message to all of you is that you are not. You are very strong, you are very powerful. Have you ever thought of yourself as an influencer? You are a mother, you are a sister, you are a daughter, you are a wife, now look at it very closely, nobody influences a child more than the mother and as the child, let’s say the boy in this case, as he grows up, perhaps the biggest influence on him as he grows up is his sister’s love. So you women out there, you have incredible power, you can change, you can influence, you can change the way men look at this world, you can teach them to respect you and other women and I can assure you that change will come, within decades you will see this change. So my message to all women out there is you are very strong, you are very powerful, you are an influencer and if all of us out there play our own tiny role in influencing society and men; I think we’ll have a different world, and very soon. Change doesn’t take very long to happen if all of us use this power.
DR. MALKA	What a wonderful, empowering message. We’ve got that power within to influence, not just ourselves, our environments and the other people who matter to us in our lives.
HC KAMBOJ	Absolutely.
DR. MALKA	Thank you so much, it’s been a real pleasure having you on our show and we wish you all the very best of luck in the forthcoming three years of your tenure.
HC KAMBOJ	Yes, thank you so much, it was a pleasure to be in your show and I look forward to seeing you needless to say in South Africa during the course of my tenure here, thank you so much.
	PROGRAMME END