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PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: MS LILLIAN PLOUMEN – DUTCH POLITICIAN WITH THE LABOUR PARTY

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 Lillian Ploumen who is a Dutch Politician with the Labour Party; she is currently serving as a member of parliament in the Netherlands and was the former minister for Foreign Trade and Development Co-Operation of the Netherlands. Prior to this she was chairwoman of the Labour Party and in terms of recent recognition she was made a Dame in the pontifical order of Saint Gregory The Great; she was awarded the Aletta Jacobs Prize for her commitment to and successful endeavours for the rights of women and girls all over the world and also won the Macchivelli Prize for creating She Decides ; a global movement for women and girls to safely exercise their rights to decide on what they do with their bodies.
DR. MALKA	Welcome to South Africa and....
MP PLOUMEN	...thank you...
DR. MALKA	...welcome to the show!
MP PLOUMEN	...yeah, very happy to be here.
DR. MALKA	We're so glad that you could join us and we will certainly be talking about She Decides in more detail because that really has been part of the crux of why you've been visiting the country. But to begin with, your career didn't start in politics and social activism has featured really prominently, beginning with your social work during your studies in the 80's; working for Foster Parents Plan; as a fundraiser and then director for Mamma Cash which was an international fund that awards grants to women's initiatives and then later working for the Development Aid Organisation.....; then you shifted into politics, chairing the Labour Party and serving as Minister of Foreign Trade and Development Co-Operation of the Netherlands. Please can you briefly share with us some of the highlights in this journey?
MP PLOUMEN	Yeah it actually...it was a wonderful journey and especially if you look at where I come from, what my background is. I come from a very loving family. My parents and grandparents came from a farmer's background. My parents had to leave school after six years so they only had primary education and when they married and they got children they made this promise to each other that their children would have any opportunity that would be in front of them and that they would not try and hold us back so that we could use every talent that we had because they came also from loving families but of course relatively poor. In those days for girls to go and study was unthinkable, yeah, they gave us a lot of self-confidence basically and so they would say, you know, you're not better than anyone else but you're also not lesser than anyone else, you're just who you are and so that gave me a lot of self-confidence but also maybe the kind of activism that you need if you really want to change things because, you know, it's not self-evident that I'm sitting here. In our family, I mean 50 years ago if

	you would have said you know one of us is becoming a minister, ahh we would not have thought that that would ever happen; not because we could not be one or that we did not have the talents, but just because it was not for us. But here I am; it is for everyone, yeah, so go for it.
DR. MALKA	When you think about it, it emphasises actually the importance of education.
MP PLOUMEN	Oh it does because that's...I mean what I always say is when I grew up my father was a milkman and we didn't have any network or connections. We had you know our talents and we had a very good education and so the education to us was our ticket to a better life, a better future and you can never underestimate the importance of education. Also of course, like many people, there's teachers that really inspire you, ...
DR. MALKA	...yes...
MP PLOUMEN	...that push you when it's needed and so that was also very helpful, yeah.
DR. MALKA	But I find it shows you what you don't know and also how much more there is to know, it's quite a humbling experience and I think that people cut themselves short if they don't continue to learn and be active in the world.
MP PLOUMEN	Oh I would definitely agree with you. There is this vast knowledge on many, many issues that you don't know yet and sometimes you learn by reading a book and studying and many times I've found you learn just listening to people and hearing their stories; getting their perspective, trying to match your own thinking to what the other says. So I think learning is also about being very open and receptive to others and not being stuck in your own way of seeing and doing things.
DR. MALKA	And in terms of doing work for others and that's going to be part of the mainstay of our conversation today; in 2017, just a year ago, you conceptualised She Decides in response to the reintroduction to the Mexico City Policy, also known as the Global Gag Rule, by the new American government; a measure which forbids American government funds to be used by organisations making safe abortions available or open to discussion. She Decides has just celebrated its one year anniversary with ministerial champions gathering in South Africa and numerous events were held around the world. Please tell us more; share the She Decides story...
MP PLOUMEN	...yeah...
DR. MALKA	...how did it begin?
MP PLOUMEN	Well real change begins with someone thinking, you know, this needs to be different or we will not accept this and this is also how She Decides started. When President Trump signed that policy I knew that it would have enormous negative impact on many, many women and girls all around the world because programmes and organisations that provide information about safe abortion also provide in sex education, provide maternal services and all those services would also be cut off and so we know that because of this policy you don't get less abortions, you get more abortions and you get more unsafe abortions with all negative consequences for women who need to undergo that and so I thought we cannot let that happen. And I was a minister at that time and so when I went to the office on Monday morning and sat with my staff I said you know we have to do something; we should try and create a fund to get the money that is lost by the decision of President Trump...
DR. MALKA	...and when we're talking about the money that's lost...
MP PLOUMEN	...yeah...
DR. MALKA	...how much are we looking at here?

MP PLOUMEN	...oh yeah, there's different estimates but let me say it's at least six hundred million dollars a year, which is....
DR. MALKA	...six hundred million a year.....
MP PLOUMEN	...a huge amount of money, so I said you know it's a huge amount of money, I don't know if we will get there but let's see, you know, let's just start. And so my staff said you know maybe you should consult first with other ministers and maybe you should consult you know with your prime minister and I said no we're not going to consult with anyone, we're just going to do it because if you start talking some initiatives get better but I just knew that this one would take forever to be created and we needed a movement now because it was very urgent. And so that's what we did, so that was Monday morning, on Tuesday we released the press statement and so I gave this small interview near my home because there was no other time slot available, in the freezing cold in January; in Amsterdam it's very cold at that time and so...and then it took off by itself and there was a lot of interest from international media, from the Al Jazeera to the BBC and many, many people started calling, emailing and colleague ministers were also calling me and saying you know, we want to be part of this and so the first ones were the Belgians, the Luxemburg's, of course our neighbours. The first African country to join very, very soon was Cabo Verde and we end up now with more than sixty countries being part of the initiative, ranging from of course South Africa to Mongolia, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Canada, well you name it, everyone is a part of it. So we raised over four hundred million Euros; so four hundred and fifty million dollars already and that's quite amazing and it's of course about the funds that we needed but it's also about amplifying the voices of women on this issue, you know, you are the only one who gets to decide if you have sex, with whom you have sex, if you have children, how many, you're the one that needs to be able to decide and that's what all of this is about and it's amazing to see how much support it got, yeah.
DR. MALKA	Well first I...congratulations, I think...
MP PLOUMEN	...thanks...
DR. MALKA	...it is absolutely fantastic and in terms of target you're almost...well you're over 2/3rds, you're pushing through to nearly 70% of target. Do you think that having this campaign running, having funding sourced from different environments where people are really involved in it is going to be sustainable and almost say okay we don't need your money US?
MP PLOUMEN	Yeah there is...there's a few ways in which to get funding for these issues; one is we get some money from Gates, there's an anonymous donor who gave fifty million dollars, there's governments, there's people like you and me donating whatever we can miss and then there is the opportunity to work with governments as activists and ask your own government to free up more money for these services within their national health budgets.
DR. MALKA	So it becomes local, it becomes national.
MP PLOUMEN	Yeah and then it's of course sustainable and this is also one of the reasons why I really wanted it to be a global movement because I mean, here in South Africa it's South African women and men who can hold their own government accountable, that's not up for me and so if everyone can do that in their own...in their own local or national context, that will in the end be super sustainable. We're not there yet and that's okay....
DR. MALKA	...well it's a young movement....
MP PLOUMEN	...yeah it's a very young movement yeah but you know I'm very ambitious. But I mean to be frank with you, if you had said to me one year ago that I

	would now be here in South Africa, that South Africa would host the second She Decides Conference, that we would have this massive support all around the world, I would say you know well thank you, yeah, I hope it will be like that but I don't think so. But here it is and so for an initiative to take off by itself, it's very rewarding. People call me the mother of She Decides, which I think is a very, very nice title, so I'm also happy like, you know, mothers do to watch out but also to let go and have its...make sure that it gets its own life and where other people also can play an important role.
DR. MALKA	Movements are important but keeping the momentum to sustain them I think is almost more important than starting it...
MP PLOUMEN	...I would agree, yeah.
DR. MALKA	What do you think needs to happen to keep the energy?
MP PLOUMEN	Well the thing is this question of course was one that I also asked myself last year, how can we keep the momentum and in a way its women all around the women who have made sure that there is this momentum. So there's young activists from the Philippines who speak out during radio shows like this one, who speak out in youth clubs, there's the Belgian Deputy Prime Minister who takes every opportunity to talk about She Decides, so it's really I would say the responsibility of everyone who feels part of the movement to keep it going. We also...someone, a civil servant in the Netherlands, came up with this great idea to have this She Decides day, so March 2 nd is the She Decides Day and on that day there were events all around the world as you already mentioned, from Mumbai to Amsterdam, from Johannesburg to Dakar an I think if a movement is strong then it gets the momentum that it really needs and it's us that keep it going, yeah, but I agree, if it's only a one-time-shot it still can be relevant but for women to be able to decide for themselves is something that, you know, it's a human right but we're not there yet so it needs to be continued.
DR. MALKA	So that's the movement; one of the things that I found beyond the movement and establishing it and for women to take ownership of their bodies themselves is that I was moved by a book...it's quite old now...Freakonomics by Steven Levitt...
MP PLOUMEN	...yeah...
DR. MALKA	...and one of the things there, he spoke about how crime rate had been reduced because of an abortion bill becoming legalised and I didn't fully appreciate it until I went into the details and when you look at what this campaign is doing, that if you have children...well (a) as you said, the abortion rate is not going to go down but what it means is that there's going to be much, much more risk to mothers because they are doing things on backstreets or unhygienic environments; there's going to be children who are unwanted, that are being born into a society that are then going to be neglected and that in itself causes a whole load of social and economic and poverty issues which sort of perpetuates the cycle which is why I think from a pro-choice perspective this movement is so important for so much more to economies.
MP PLOUMEN	I would agree with you, I mean there's a lot of studies that come up with data that give the evidence that if women have full access to economic opportunities like men, then the world economy would be growing at a pace that you know we can't even imagine and so we're losing not only on an individual level as women, but also on the more macro level we're losing a lot of opportunities as a society by not providing women with all means of production that we provide men with and so for women to have access is

	<p>important, but also to have control over their bodies. One of the things that clinics do that give sex education and provide safe abortion is that they also give post-abortion care and so they would talk to girls when they had to have an abortion about how to make sure to protect themselves the next time around and of course the crooks in the back alleys, they don't do that, and so for women and girls to have to go to all those...well I call them crooks, it's just criminal, I mean who wants to be responsible for that? I don't want to be responsible for that.</p>
DR. MALKA	It sounds like a butcher shop.
MP PLOUMEN	Well and they look like it and what they do is, I mean, the stories that you sometimes hear, is...it's appalling, it's 2018, why do we let women go through these things? It's horrible, really horrible.
DR. MALKA	Well, well done on starting this movement, being the pioneer and allowing it to be championed and lived through others.
MP PLOUMEN	Thank you.
DR. MALKA	Staying with the aspect of championing women's rights; in 2018 Iceland became the first country in the world to make it illegal to pay men more than women for doing the same job. I think it's astounding that unequal pay is still a reality around the world, countries do have various legislations. South Africa, for instance, has the equal pay for work of equal value. I recall a year or so ago Sales Force in the USA, the CEO decided to consciously up the salaries of women so everyone was on equal terms. In January the BBC, there were six men who said we will reduce our salaries in order for you to increase our female counterpart's salaries. Firstly I don't think they should be decreasing their salaries, I think that women's salaries should be increased but that's another point...but besides that, you have been instrumental in driving the agenda and now you're taking a bill, in effect, to parliament in the Netherlands to almost replicate what happened in Iceland; can you tell us more about this process, where it is, how it started?
MP PLOUMEN	<p>I, like you, I read about this bill in Iceland and I thought this is an amazing idea because this gender pay gap has been there forever and no-one really wants it but it's there and we don't seem to get it under control so in the Netherlands the gender pay gap on average is 16% and that's a lot and so when I read about this bill I thought I'm going to do the same for the Netherlands and so we started to read about it and we got the bill, which of course was in a language that we do not understand, but I was approached by a girl whose father is from Iceland, whose mother is Dutch and she said you know can I help and I said yes, you can translate the bill for us, and so that's what she did and three other political parties; the Greens, the Socialist Party and our party for Fifty Plus, for our senior party they said you know we want to work with you and so we're now very close to bringing the bill to parliament. It's really the concept that is also used in Iceland and what it does, and this is I think is essential, the bill says it's the responsibility of the employer to pay equal for equal work and so that really changes the narrative because now it's the responsibility of the employee to think mmmm do I get paid enough? Should I get more? And this is a very uncomfortable process because you have to go to your male colleague and say how much do you earn; in my country that is a bit of a taboo also, talking about salaries, and then you have to go to your manager, this is not a process that you want to go through.</p>
DR. MALKA	...so you almost have to prove....
MP PLOUMEN	...yes...

DR. MALKA	...that you are being paid less...
MP PLOUMEN	...yes, well you have to basically and then your employer can take it up...or not...
DR. MALKA	...even though the employer knows exactly how much he or she is paying every person on the payroll...
MP PLOUMEN	...I know, I know but they don't make that kind of calculation and that's very interesting because there's a lot of employers who also talk to me and say you know this bothers me too but I just don't know how to handle it so we hope that this bill will help. The process in the Netherlands is so we take it, we present it and then we consult; there's a formal period of consulting, which is I think good. So the Trade Unions, the Employer's Associations, everyone can give some feedback and then it gets better because of the feedback and then we'll bring it to parliament and so I can just not imagine that there will parties who will be voting against this, I mean everyone is talking about women's rights and you know and how important it is and all those values. Well this is the point in time where you can say you know I really think women have the same rights as men do and so I will vote for this bill, so its, ja..it's been an interesting process and I've never been in parliament and so making a bill is quite a complex thing to do but I love to take initiatives and not wait for others and so when I read about the bill, as I said, I thought ja this is what we need in my country too, ja.
DR. MALKA	That does to be a theme of asking for forgiveness rather than asking for permission.
MP PLOUMEN	Oh yes of course, ja. Well I was born and raised as a Catholic and this is a very Catholic thing to do ja. Do first and then if you have to ask for forgiveness just do it. But you know the thing is I seldom have to ask for forgiveness because the things that you feel that you need to do are usually not only your personal hang-up; it's something that many other people would also feel that it's needed so, ja, well the time might come that I need to ask for forgiveness but I'm ready for it. Ja.
DR. MALKA	Today we're talking to Ms Lillian Ploumen who is a Dutch Politician currently serving as a member of parliament in the Netherlands.
DR. MALKA	One of the things that I consider to be important is female leadership in terms of helping to develop women, capacitating them further and also demonstrating to both men and women that women can be competent leaders because sometimes you'll see some hesitancy in older women for example on their preconceived misconceptions of what women can do; so if you can please tell us how do you think women occupying positions of leadership influence younger women to consider non-stereotypical roles as viable career options.
MP PLOUMEN	For younger women I think it's really important to see that it can be done. That means that in all spheres of life I think you need role models and this is true for politics on every level, local, national and international. It's true for the business sector where in my country we're lagging behind, we have very few women CEO's of multinational companies, we have not enough women in boards for example and if you look at our academia we have female professors but we're very, very, very, very low on the list so Botswana for example seems to have more...relatively more female professors than the Netherlands has and so it's a bit of a struggle still to make sure that women take up positions...that women are invited to take up positions and I think the progress that we made is that basically more or less everyone feels that that is a situation that cannot be sustained. So in earlier days it was the women's movement and we ourselves that were very unhappy with the situation and nowadays you see more and more men also

	<p>saying you know this is not how it should be, which I think helps, and one of the lessons that I always give to younger women is; do not be shy. So we have this...there is this concept of how women and men look at their own opportunities so if you invite a woman that works for you to...if you offer her a different job, a promotion, then usually she would say to you oh really, you think I can do that at this point in my career already? And then you say yeah of course because otherwise I would not have asked you, and so if you ask a man he would probably say oh I thought you would never offer this to me. Right. And so I think women should not be shy, should be more self-confident and knowing that they react like that it's also the responsibility of managers to maybe ask a few times and not take the first no for an answer and we need this progress and I don't know, I mean it might be different in South Africa and across the continent, but in my country there's still this concept that you cannot be a good mother if you work fulltime and so my mother she didn't have an out of house job but she did work more than full time, obviously and I don't think that working fulltime that relates to being a good mother or a good father at all. Everyone chooses their own path, but truth is if you really want to...want to make a career you have to work fulltime, you cannot do it by two days and so you can choose not to, which is fine with me I mean I would encourage you to live up to your full potential. And so if a government feels that women should be more active in the workplace they should also provide the facilities; the childcare and everything that is related to that, for women and men to have a healthy work-life balance. So there is this cultural notion that is ingrained in our brains which also sometimes makes it difficult for women to say hey, listen, I do want to make a career and this is what I am going to do.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And it's a challenge I'd say when you put on your work cap and you go to work and you're in your work environment and doing your job, performing, but at the end of the day you take that cap off and you go home, you still have to address family members, cultures, so if you've got older parents why are you working, who's putting the dinner on the table, who's looking after the children and the reality is that a lot of the unpaid labour has fallen to the responsibility of women so for people who...women who are working they're almost having to do a second shift to perform in their career and then still deliver on the goods to make sure that the home is running.</p>
MP PLOUMEN	<p>Well and of course this is something that many women all around the world struggle with and so like I said you need kind of policies to empower women to make the right choices and you need to have conversation at home. So if your partner is not willing to take up this family life as a joint responsibility, it will be very...continue to be very tough on women to work out of the home and work inside of the home and so this would be my second advice to young women, you know, choose well who your partner is and if it's someone who's a nice guy but doesn't take any responsibility, maybe you should rethink your choices.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>It's got to be a partnership; that I think...</p>
MP PLOUMEN	<p>...that's it...</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>...is the key thing...</p>
MP PLOUMEN	<p>...that's it...</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>...and in that its delegating responsibility is how you operate...</p>
MP PLOUMEN	<p>...ja and there's lots of nice men who are willing and able to take that responsibility jointly.</p>

DR. MALKA	It's also the way people have been brought up and the fundamental figure is probably the mother who is bringing people up, so I think that's another added responsibility on women on nurturing and nourishing their children to become appropriately functioning adults in society.
MP PLOUMEN	Yesterday I listened to a minister from Norway explaining that she considered herself to have two important jobs; one was to raise her two boys into men that would take that responsibility jointly and the other was being a minister and doing well for her country and so I would agree with you that the role of the mother is key. If a mother promotes her kids, sons and daughters, to become who they want to be, that is so powerful for them and that will help them through life and if a mother respects...learns her sons to respect girls and women that is also an asset for her son to be carried through his life and be a good person to everyone and so that responsibility is enormous. But of course it cannot be...it cannot fall on the mother alone, there's a whole society around that that creates and recreates models that might not be, you know, promoting equality of women and men and so we need to continue to fight against that.
DR. MALKA	We are unfortunately coming towards the end of the show and I'd like to turn a little bit more towards your personal perspective in the last sort of five minutes that we have and one of the questions that I ask all my guests who've made tremendous achievements in their respective fields of expertise is about the factors that they think have contributed to their success. Some people speak about hard work, perseverance, resilience; if you could share with us a few of those factors?
MP PLOUMEN	The defining factor I think for my career has been the confidence that my parents have given me that I can do whatever I want to do and that I can be whatever I can be and so here again the role of parents is very important. Of course I worked hard, some would say you know I tend to be a workaholic and I have to say that is true maybe, so there is hard work but I never suffered from that, I have to say, I really always enjoy what I am doing and if I don't enjoy it anymore I consider a change and so it gives me a lot of energy. Having said that, my family is very important to me, our children are grown up now but to come home and kind of to have to shift gears is very healthy for a person and when you're a minister of course everyone wants to do the right thing for you and they open doors and they carry your bags and they do all these kinds of things and then it's very good to come home and you know your kids are saying you know sorry mom we didn't leave supper for you, you have to cook something for yourself...
DR. MALKA	...a reality check...
MP PLOUMEN	...a reality check and so my family and I have to say throughout my career and my life I've had the opportunity to have a wonderful group of friends who are very supportive. We meet every six weeks and we talk about you know career and life and everything and if we can support each other, you know, we do that and so I think also that the feeling that whatever you're doing you are supported by friends and family is really important. My final word on this would be something which I mentioned earlier on. Never underestimate what you can do. Do not be shy. There's no reason to be shy because you're a special person as you are and everyone has talents so please speak up and make sure that you are heard because you're worth listening to.
DR. MALKA	Those are really strong factors that are very practical. Can you tell us a few of the pivotal moments in your life growing up that had a big impact on you?

MP PLOUMEN	One of the moments that I remember is when I was in fifth grade, I was eleven years old, we...at school we had a project, that was like the new thing and the project was about the war in Vietnam and this was the first time that I realised that wars are political choices made by men and so if you would speak about you know coming of age politically, for me that has been a very defining moment and otherwise we...so we were not very affluent and we didn't go on holidays and we never went abroad to other countries but the world came to us because, you know, we read papers and people came in who had travelled and so this concept of that there is more than your own small environment, there's a world out there that also needs you maybe, is something that my parents really pressed on us and the fact that, you know, although we were not very rich, we had a very good life compared to many, many other people who had to struggle for their freedom and their voice and for their food every day and so this kind of...this feeling of you have to be in solidarity with others. I mean that's not one moment, but that really is something that I've been brought up with and that I carry with me in a very positive sense I have to say, yeah.
DR. MALKA	Solidarity. What would you say has been the best lesson that you've learnt, or lessons?
MP PLOUMEN	Oh that's of course...every day you learn, there's a lesson...maybe I should...the lesson that I learnt is...the one that I give is I think relevant for other women. The lesson that I learnt is that you have to live up to your position. In the Netherlands we are relatively informal and our higher key is not very visible so we do not have a lot of protocol for example. In a way that's a good thing because everyone can express themselves like they want to. For women it's not that good because you have to create your own protocol so that people understand when you're a minister; this is the minister who walks into the room and this is the woman in the room who is...has...holds the most power of all of us and so the lesson I would say to women is to make sure that everyone understands what your position is. Sometimes the higher key can do that for you, sometimes protocol does it for you, but if that doesn't work out for you, you have to do it for yourself.
DR. MALKA	I haven't heard that before and I think it is a really, really important lesson. Now lastly as we close out the show today can you please share a few words of inspiration that you'd like to impart to young women that are listening to us today?
MP PLOUMEN	I'm very, very honoured to...always to be speaking to younger women. I would say follow your own path, which means make your own choices and do not have regrets, there's always new opportunity and never hesitate if you feel that you can do something that is meaningful, that can be you know, in your own family or community but you can also make sure that other women in other parts of your country or the world benefit from what you do. And so don't be afraid, don't be shy, go for it and if necessary ask for forgiveness but if that's not necessary do not do it. So I would say the lesson from She Decides is we say to everyone you know "stand up and speak out."
DR. MALKA	Thank you so much for joining us, it's been an absolute pleasure having you on our show and we will certainly look out into the news to see how the movement changes with She Decides and also the progress that is made in terms of attaining equal pay for work of equal value.
MP PLOUMEN	Thank you so much, it was great to be on your show.
PROGRAMME END	