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PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: PROFESSOR SARAH GRAVETT – EXECUTIVE DEAN – FACULTY OF EDUCATION AT UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG

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 Professor Sarah Gravett who is the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Johannesburg. Prior to joining the institution she worked at the Bureau of University Education as a researcher; she was also a high school teacher for eleven years. In addition to her role as Dean she performs several other education related functions being the custodian of the University of Johannesburg's Metropolitan Academy; a highly successful secondary school which serves children from disadvantaged communities; she also represents teacher education institutions in the National Teacher Education and Development Committee and from 2013 to 2017 she was appointed by the Minister of Basic Education as Chairperson of the Education Sector Committee of the South African National Commission for UNESCO. Welcome to the show!
PROF GRAVETT	Thank you very much!
DR. MALKA	To begin with, in 2007 you were appointed to the position of Executive Dean – Faculty of Education; can you please share with us some of the work that you do as well as the responsibilities that come with holding this position?
PROF GRAVETT	It is a very privileged position to be a dean at a university such as the University of Johannesburg. My main task as a dean is to provide leadership to the Faculty of Education, which implies strategic leadership but also leadership in terms of the day-to-day management of the faculty, which means I oversee teaching and learning in the faculty; I oversee the research that is being done in the faculty, the fund raising, the community work and of course a part of my job which relates to teaching and learning because students are crucial to our work, is also engaging with students and that is the part that I particularly love. As you mentioned I was a high school teacher and I'm still a teacher at heart. I will always remain a teacher.
DR. MALKA	That passion is very loud and clear in all of the different dynamics that you have there. What would you say is the greatest challenge in the role?
PROF GRAVETT	You know working with academics is a huge privilege, but also a challenge. They are individualists so one needs to be able to work with the different personalities, to accommodate all the different views and perspectives. I do think another challenge is that we are working with many students who come from impoverished backgrounds and it often breaks one's heart that you can only help some and not all of them, but on the other hand also is part of the privilege. When you see a first year student entry and leaving after four years and you know this young woman's / young man's life has been changed forever; wow, what a privilege.
DR. MALKA	So rewarding and also I would say knowing that you as a faculty have touched this individual's life but that individual is now going out into the world and is going to touch many, many more young people.

PROF GRAVETT	Absolutely and that is what is so rewarding. For me a high point each year is the graduation ceremonies when you see these young people walking over the stage and you see their families there and you see how proud they are and you think wow, in a very small way I have contributed to this. Wonderful!
DR. MALKA	And I think that's what everyone wants to have is make a meaningful contribution to society.
PROF GRAVETT	Absolutely!
DR. MALKA	Are there any specific milestones that you want to reach?
PROF GRAVETT	Since I became dean we've achieved a lot in the Faculty of Education at the University of Johannesburg and I'm very proud of the work that we have done, but if I had to single out something that I would really like to achieve, or make a contribution to, is trying to change the perception of teachers. The low status of teachers in this country is something that I really find very disheartening and in particular the low status of foundation phase teachers; the teachers in the early years of schooling, elementary education...
DR. MALKA	...and those are so fundamental...
PROF GRAVETT	...they are the most important teachers in a child's life and those are the teachers that we really need to honour. Those are the teachers that people must give support to and yet it is not the case and we also find that many young people who might be interested becoming foundation phase teachers are being told why would you want to do that? You are such a talented person and that is something that we really need to work very hard on in this country.
DR. MALKA	And what type's interventions do you see happening to help change those perceptions?
PROF GRAVETT	I do think we need a major intervention, not only by universities as such, in ensuring that the teacher education qualifications that we offer are of very high quality. Secondly also we need activism around this....
DR. MALKA	...communities...
PROF GRAVETT	...yes indeed in communities and we also need to ensure that we need to ensure that we have very good teachers in foundation phase who can serve as role models for others. So it's not something that is going to happen overnight; changing this negative perception and changing the status of teachers in this country, but it's something that we definitely need to focus on.
DR. MALKA	Totally worthy cause and you know I can't tell you how many countless interviews I've had where people will tell me there'll be a family member that has influenced them and someone in primary school.
PROF GRAVETT	Absolutely.
DR. MALKA	So that really echo's your whole sentiment about the importance of making sure that the foundational level gets the right attention that it deserves. Now as a world we are functioning in an incredibly globally connected society; can you share with us some of the more significant collaborations or research projects that you've been involved with, with counterparts in other countries?
PROF GRAVETT	The Faculty of Education has numerous collaborations with many countries but let me single out two that I have been involved in and still are involved in. The one was with Harvard Graduate School of Education and we had a major project in Soweto where we worked with leadership development of school principals and also district directors. This is still ongoing and we do believe that if you want to see change that endures, you

	<p>need to work with the different levels in the system, not only on one level and that makes this particular intervention quite successful. The other major collaboration is with the University of Healthwe really love the work that the Fins are doing in education; at many levels the best in the world also in terms of teacher education. Of course their situation is quite different from ours and people will often say but you know but they're a small country with only a few people, why work with them? My point of departure is always we must learn from the best in the world and not take what they do but learn from them and then organically grow our own projects and our own programmes in this country and we have been working there closely with them on different levels in terms of teacher education and work that we do specifically on our Soweto campus. I must also single out work maybe that my colleague, Elizabeth Henning who holds a National Research Foundation chair in childhood education basically, has been doing with the University of Duisburg-Essen Essen and also with Harvard University in terms of literacy in the early years, maths and science development in the early years.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>I also read that as an institution that you'd established an institute for childhood education and what interested me there was it wasn't only a facility where children could come through and learn but you were also almost using it as a research lab, so this live lab...</p>
PROF GRAVETT	<p>...indeed...</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>...of being able to test what's effective...</p>
PROF GRAVETT	<p>...absolutely. Very proud of the work that is being done in childhood education at our Soweto campus. Yes, what we've done, we've established a school on our campus and this school serves the children in Soweto, that was for us very important firstly, but secondly it serves the same type of function that a training hospital serves, so in other words our students have the opportunity to move from the university classroom into the school classroom, back to the university classroom. So they gain firsthand experience of teaching in that school, but particularly important, they study the children in the school because we believe that a good teacher, particularly in a primary school must have a solid understanding of child development. They follow the same group of children over four years and study them; how they develop and they are also assigned a specific child, each of them that they do a case study of. I can really say after four years our students understand child development but it's also an education laboratory so when we plan research, for instance the research that I indicated on mathematical cognition, etc., we pilot the research many times in the school before we go at scale.</p>
DR.MALKA	<p>And do you see some of those approaches then being rolled out into the general curriculum almost as a national level?</p>
PROF GRAVETT	<p>The National Department of Education and the Gauteng Department of Education is very much aware of the work that we are doing and we are often involved in some of their projects also. I must say the current minister of Basic Education, Minister Motshekga, when I came with the idea to establish the school, she was the one in Gauteng who supported this idea and she has been supporting this all the way.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And she has been a fantastic minister, I'll never forget when we interviewed her on the programme she said that that was....education was the one thing that her mother said this is your marriage certificate, be married to education because no-one can take that away from you.</p>

PROF GRAVETT	I agree. I agree fully.
DR. MALKA	Now moving on, you've already touched base on some of the educational aspects that the university and the faculty have developed beyond you know their core focus of educating students; I'd mentioned in the intro that you represent educational institutions at the National Teacher Education Development Committee; you also chair the Education Dean's Forum in South Africa and as we've been talking about Minister Motshekga that you were chairperson of the Educational Sector Committee of the South African National Commission for UNESCO and another project which you'd been involved with was the...I think it's the Siyabuswa; a project for a rural area in Mpumalanga where you were looking at establishing foundation phase teacher education programmes. Can you share a few highlights from these roles and some of the outcomes that they've achieved?
PROF GRAVETT	Let me start with the Siyabuswa project. Based on the work that we've done and are still doing on our Soweto campus, I was approached by the Department of Higher Education and Training during the time when they were planning to establish the University of Mpumalanga, they asked whether I would be willing to oversee the establishment of a teacher education programme in Siyabuswa, a rural area in Mpumalanga, which will eventually form part of the University of Mpumalanga, and I said yes. So we worked there for four years helping the University of Mpumalanga basically to start with a foundation phase programme in Siyabuswa, somewhat similar to the work that we are doing on our Soweto campus. What I also particularly enjoyed, and we're still busy with that part of the project, is working with a number of schools also in the area of Siyabuswa. These are the schools where students go for their school experience or their practicum but it's also of course a social responsibility work that we are doing there. I'm very thankful that this work has been funded by USAID and ALMA Foundations; you know without funders such as those, one simply doesn't have the means to do this very important work. Something else that we were doing in Siyabuswa was to work with the local African languages, development of those languages for the foundation phase; isiSwathi and isiNdebele and maybe just to mention the good news that I have been able to secure a good grant to start a centre for African Languages Teaching at our Soweto campus and we will be starting this year and the focus of this Centre for African Languages Teaching will again be the early years of schooling but focusing on the languages of isiSotho and isiZulu.
DR. MALKA	It's a fantastic achievement and people underestimate how important being taught in your first language is.
PROF GRAVETT	Yes indeed, it is very, very important and it's important that we do research in this area specifically related to our African languages very little research has been done. It's also very important that we ensure that we have very good teachers and that we train them very well to do this and that we also help to produce learning material. We actually launched last year, a website called the Knowledge For Action Website, in our faculty and what we do on that website is we place everything that we develop in terms of childhood education, in terms of also in the future the African languages and make it freely available for teachers.
DR. MALKA	And that's live for anyone to use as a resource.
PROF GRAVETT	Anybody can use that.

DR. MALKA	Wonderful. Now our programme ‘Womanity – Women in Unity’ is all about gender and one of the areas that I’d like to ask you about is because also you’re a woman and that’s why you’re here and having this profile, is your perspectives regarding women’s empowerment and gender equality legislation, especially in terms of closing some of the gender gaps, whether that is in promotion or pay or in positions? We’ve just had World International Women’s day, in your point of view, are you happy with the state of gender equality in our country?
PROF GRAVETT	Oh definitely not. You think of the violence against women, that in itself tells you we have a very, very long way to go and secondly something that puzzles me and worries me is also when I look at some young women who so easily fall into the stereotypical roles for women and one would think why are you still willing to do that and the question is whether the patriarchal society is so deeply ingrained in the minds of these young women that they actually don’t necessarily see other ways. I’m not for one moment doubting that some women might choose voluntarily to fulfil certain roles and I’m not doubting that they have the right to do that but I’m not always sure whether it’s a decision and whether it’s an expectation of others that they are fulfilling and that...
DR. MALKA	...it’s almost as...
PROF GRAVETT	...is worrying for me...
DR. MALKA	...a conscious decision as opposed to being dictated to and saying well this is how it is, this is what our culture is and...
PROF GRAVETT	...exactly...
DR. MALKA	...this is the expectation of you...
PROF GRAVETT	...ja and exactly but you mentioned here in terms of culture, many young women will say but my culture expects this from me and I would ask but is that what you would want and they would say not necessarily. So there’s still this struggle also with many of young women to understand what their role is and what their role could be. If you also think about pay for equal work, we’re not there yet, definitely not and even if you look at academic institutions, the situation has improved dramatically since I started as a young woman in academia in terms of women professors and professors in leadership positions but it’s still the case that the far majority of professors in academia are men and also in leadership positions.
DR. MALKA	And that pattern just seems to mimic in almost every sector of industry, whether that is in the government sphere, particularly so in the business and corporate world and in academia, we’re really not seeing enough women at the top. And on that note, what do you think we can do in terms of changing that situation and improving the scenario for more women to move up the ladder of success?
PROF GRAVETT	I think from a very young age young girls must understand that they can do anything that they want to. So parents have a role to play there, in the very first instance, and then secondly those of us who have done well as women, I think we have a huge responsibility towards supporting other women, to be role models for them, to assist them to see opportunities and when they get the opportunities also to help them to grow in those opportunities that come their way. So it’s a responsibility that all of us as women and men have to play and I must say something here in my own academic career there were some men who did amazing things for me, so we also have them who see that it’s also their role to create opportunities for young men and young women.

DR. MALKA	I think that's a very important point, that it'sI think for a long time it has been women trying to support other women and improving the lives for women but the reality is that we are 50% of the population, that we need our men folk to embrace us as much and these ideals for them to believe in order to get a change.
PROF GRAVETT	Absolutely, I agree.
DR. MALKA	You've mentioned that you'd had a lot of support from men and also presumably from women in your early career stage; can you share with us some of the gender challenges that you'd experienced and encountered as you were moving up through the ranks?
PROF GRAVETT	You know when I was a school teacher it was during the time that you couldn't get a permanent position if you were a married woman....
DR. MALKA	..if you were a married woman you couldn't get a permanent position...?
PROF GRAVETT	...yes, secondly....
DR. MALKA	...what was the logic?
PROF GRAVETT	Because men are the people who look after the households...
DR.MALKA	...the breadwinners...
PROF GRAVETT	...the breadwinners you know, and when I started in academia we didn't get housing allowances as men did. So there were these types of discrimination that we had to deal with, luckily that has changed in the meanwhile. But it was also sometimes subtle things, you know, the small thing of there would be five or six people and you would be expected to be the person to pour the tea because you are the woman, you know, these types of small, very irritating things, but also that young women, even in academia were not readily promoted in the past. If you look at men and women at more or less the same level the men seemed to make progress and many women stayed behind. It could be because people in leadership positions were mainly men. So these were the challenges, but you know for me it was always important to see these challenges but to decided I'm not going to allow any of these challenges to hold me back. I was also never oversensitive about these things. I would see the things and ignore them and just do my work to the best of my ability and also of course not being timid, raise issues when you think issues should be raised, it doesn't always make you popular but in the end people respect you and that is quite important.
DR. MALKA	And given the journey that you've walked and the experiences that you've been confronted by; what advice would you give to younger women who are facing similar issues, how would you suggest that they deal with them?
PROF GRAVETT	Don't be oversensitive; see when you are being discriminated against and rationally decide how you're going to deal with this and there are many ways to deal with this and the one is make sure that you are very good at what you do because if you are consistently good at what you do people can't ignore you.
DR. MALKA	So they can't discredit your work.
PROF GRAVETT	Absolutely. So your work should talk for you for me that is hugely important and secondly also, as I said, speak up. Do speak up when you think there is discrimination, where you think your work is not being given the credit that it deserves.
DR. MALKA	Well thank you for sharing some of your experiences, I must say I was sitting here almost with my mouth dropping onto the table that you had to go through these and these were the realities that women faced, but also, more importantly

	how to overcome those types of challenges.
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.
DR. MALKA	Today we are talking to Professor Sarah Gravett who is the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Johannesburg. We would love to receive your comments on Twitter: @WomanityTalk.
DR. MALKA	Prof Gravett your research initially focused on transformative learning in higher education with dialogic teaching and the design of learning environments, well recently your work has shifted towards teacher education. In the period 2009 to 2011 you led a research project on learning to become a teacher, novice teachers entering the teaching profession; you also have and briefly we mentioned this earlier in terms of establishing teaching schools at teacher education institutions in South Africa. Can you share with us some of the significant learnings that have come out of these research studies?
PROF GRAVETT	In terms of young teachers entering the teaching profession it remains daunting and the universities are often criticized that we are not preparing students sufficiently for the demands of teaching. I think this criticism is partly valid and I often say to colleagues we must look very carefully and critically at what we offer in terms of teacher education and how much we are doing to indeed prepare students well for the demands and the challenges once they enter the teaching profession. On the other hand I don't think you can ever fully prepare a teacher for the challenges that await them. The first time that you are fully responsible for these children for a full day you realise what teaching's about. I can remember my first few months of teaching; I was so, so tired. So now no matter how well you do in terms of your initial teacher education, what is equally important, and that is also what our research showed, is what is being done in schools to enculturate these young, new teachers into the culture in the school and to give support to them. Something anecdotal but that came from our research was when we followed some of our students who graduated with us, same programme, and we asked them how well do you think we prepared you and some of them would have said very well and some said you didn't prepare us very well and then when we started probing we realised those who landed in schools where the school also gave support to them, thought they were very well prepared for the profession. Those who were left on their own when entering the teaching profession felt that they were not well prepared. So it's a two-way street and that's also the core of lots of the research that we have conducted is also the role of schools in terms of novice teachers and also when we place our students for school experience in those schools. The research in terms of the teaching school is basically on the success that we've had with our school on our Soweto campus and the question was what can we do maybe, or can it be done, to have these types of schools at all teacher education institutions in the future. So this is what our research has focused on and we gave some pointers which we think could be implemented and it's become part of the future vision in this country, whether it's going to happen very soon, I'm not sure.
DR. MALKA	I hope that it does for the sake of not only the students, but also the children that are going to be learning from them. And interesting what I found from a teaching profession, it seems to be the one sector that favours women as opposed to men, we seem to find more women in teaching and you are clearly exuding all of your passion about educating teachers and emphasising that it's not only that they are well equipped to become teachers, but also that they have

	a strong aspect of social responsibility....
PROF GRAVETT	...absolutely...
DR. MALKA	...looking at that early childhood development and knowing what and who that they're working with. So you've engaged with community service, linked to disadvantaged schools and community organisations; how do you see the responsibilities of universities towards shaping the thinking of students as our country and also the continent's future socio-political, economic players?
PROF GRAVETT	I think it's crucially important that all university students understand their civic and social responsibility also. That you as a citizen of the country need to be a critical citizen but also a citizen who is willing to make a significant contribution to the uplifting of your communities where you work and to society in general. Secondly in the time that we live now it is also our responsibility to ensure that our student teachers understand technology and how to use technology in schools, also in education. I think a particular challenge in our country is because we have a system with highly sophisticated schools on the one hand and then on the other hand schools that don't have basic facilities. It is important that we prepare student teachers to be able to function in both and that is for me crucially, crucially important.
DR. MALKA	And how is that working because we've got a world that is developing at a rate of knots, we have a curriculum which cannot possibly keep pace with these changes; what do we do?
PROF GRAVETT	This is where I think our teachers must be taught not only to implement a curriculum and I'm in constant debate with some of the teacher unions and others who say but you are not preparing the students to implement the school curriculums sufficiently and I would say we are preparing teachers for a profession in teaching and that means we must, yes, help them to understand the current school curriculum but that can't be our main focus. We need to teach them to be innovative, we need to teach them to be critical, creative, so that when they are in an environment that is constantly changing that they are able to adapt to the changes and also foresee changes and being able to make the plans that will help them to deal with the constant changes. So we're doing student teachers a disservice if we train them for now. The question is always should we train them for the current circumstance and for the future and my answer is for both, that is our responsibility.
DR. MALKA	And how do you see the role of learning new skills such as programming and coding because I always see this as a second or a third language, in order to be equipped for this new world that we live in?
PROF GRAVETT	I think our student teachers should be ICT savvy, without a doubt, you know they don't necessarily need to understand how to do the programming as such but they need to understand what is available, how to get hold of it, how to adapt what is available. So we spend at UJ at lot of time enabling our students to work with the knowledge that is available on the internet and the debate also that we're constantly having in the faculty is knowledge is available freely, what does that mean for the teaching profession? You're not the sage and the stage; you are not the person anymore who has the knowledge. You need to be an enabler in the classroom of how to use knowledge creatively, productively. So we are also constantly being challenged to rethink and re-imagine what teaching and teacher education is about.
DR. MALKA	Now turning towards more of a personal perspective, one of the questions that I ask all my guests who have made significant contributions in their respective

	fields is about some of the factors that they consider have contributed to their success. What have been some of your key success factors?
PROF GRAVETT	I think for me is to do work that is meaningful. Meaning for me is the core. I can't imagine spending my time on...and energy on something that I don't think is meaningful, that is not making a contribution and that has always been the main driving force in my life is that I am hoping to leave this world a better place after the leaving the world and therefore the meaningfulness of my work. If your work is meaningful and meaningful is not the same as loving your work all the time, I don't love what I do all the time, but I always find the work meaningful and if it's meaningful it means I am willing to put in the energy. I am willing to stand up when there are stumbling blocks and when you fall, because that happens, it means you have the resilience to continue and resilience I think is crucially important and yes, perseverance and then also the willingness to take risks, that I think is crucial because nothing that is really worthwhile is not without risks. Now I'm not saying one must be foolish but if you are not willing to think yes this might fail but I'm still going to do it, you will see little progress.
DR. MALKA	So it breaks the status quo...
PROF GRAVETT	...indeed.
DR. MALKA	Takes you out of the comfort zone and...
PROF GRAVETT	...exactly...
DR. MALKA	...forces you into a new direction and that's the only way we can achieve change.
PROF GRAVETT	Absolutely.
DR. MALKA	Could you share with us some of the pivotal moments in your life growing up; what influenced you in those years?
PROF GRAVETT	I grew up on a farm in a small rural area and I do think my mother played a significant role in my life. I grew up in a rather patriarchal family system but I had a strong mother and a mother who, from a very young age told me I could do anything that I want. Some of my fondest memories is sitting as a young child with my mother in the kitchen round the coal stove, the area I grew up was quite cold and having long conversations with her and thinking back I think that was significant in shaping me to be, in a sense, fearless, and to see the world as a place of challenges, but challenges that you can deal with.
DR. MALKA	And lastly as we close out the show today could you share a few words of inspiration that you'd like to pass on to younger women listening to us?
PROF GRAVETT	You know I love reading so reading has enriched my life at so many levels and one of the most significant books that I read many years ago already and I revisit it sometimes is a book written by Victor Frankl who was a Holocaust survivor and a professor of neuropsychology and he wrote the book "A Man's Search For Meaning" and he wrote in that book about his experiences in the concentration camp and one of the things that he said; even in those circumstances you had people who dealt with it with dignity and others...in others it brought out the worst in them and the words that he said that has stayed with me forever is "the one last choice that you always have is your attitude" so you can't always choose your circumstances but you can always choose your attitude in your circumstances and that, I think, has for me been inspiring in my life. When things were difficult, when things were challenging I said to myself it's

	about my attitude, how am I going to deal with this.
DR. MALKAT	That is such an important quality and really I think it's such a practical tip, so thank you so much for that and thank you very much for joining us today and spending time sharing your experiences, looking at how the education sector influences and where it is changing to help evolve our society.
PROF GRAVETT	Thank you very much for the invitation, I love talking about education because it's so close to my heart.
DR. MALKA	Thanks again.
	PROGRAMME END