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GUEST NAME: MS ANA LUISA FAJER - AMBASSADOR OF MEXICO TO SOUTH AFRICA, ANGOLA, BOTSWANA, NAMIBIA, MALAWI, LESOHO, SWAZILAND, MOZAMBIQUE, ZIMBABWE, MADAGASCAR, MAURITIUS AND ZAMBIA

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 is in studio today is the Ambassador of Mexico to South Africa, Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Malawi, Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Mauritius and Zambia; Ms Ana Luisa Fajer. She has been a member of the Mexican Foreign Service since 1993; she was promoted to the rank of Minister in 2017 and some of her posts have been Deputy Chief of Mission at Mexico's Embassy in the United States, Director General for North America, Director General for Africa and the Middle East, Head of the Consulate in Saint Paul and Advisor on the Foreign Ministries Advisory Staff. Welcome to the show Ambassador!
AMBASSADOR FAJER	Thank you, thank you Amaleya for the invitation; I'm thrilled to be here, thank you.
DR. MALKA	We know that you're very new in terms of coming through to South Africa as Primary Resident so we wish you all the best in your tenure during your portfolio and term of office in South Africa and this broader mix of countries.
ABASSADOR FAJER	Absolutely, thank you so much.
DR. MALKA	To start with you're no stranger to Africa, having served as a Director for Africa from 1991 to 1998, then as General Director for Africa in the Middle East from 2005 to 2008; you did your master's in African studies, you speak Swahili; one could almost say that your new role as Ambassador in this bouquet of different countries has been years in the making.
ABASSADOR FAJER	Yeah. Yes, well let me start by sharing with you how did I become so passionate about Africa.
DR. MALKA	Yes!
ABASSADOR FAJER	I studied; I have a BA degree in International Relations from the most important University in Mexico, the largest and the largest in Latin America which is the National University of Mexico. So I was taking different subjects, I was in my last year at the university and I was obliged to take a course about the methodology of international relations in order for me to be ready to write my thesis so I had to...that was a mandatory subject. So I saw the least of professors and I saw well Dr. Fabiano.....and I said well who is he and I realised that he was from Benin or Benin and so I said well let's see his programme, his proposals. So I became a student of him and the first day that I got there in the class he said do you know what, you are here, we were just seven students.
DR. MALKA	That's very small, that's very intimate....
ABASSADOR FAJER	...very, very small, very intimate, ja it was a very small group and he said you know what, we are not going to talk anything about methodology, we're going to talk about Africa and I was like Africa, really? It was really...it was very provocative and I said why not, I mean everybody was involved into Europe, Asia, North America, the US, Canada etc., Japan was

	<p>the fashion at that time and I said to myself well why not Africa? Africa, nobody is studying Africa, probably we'll have an area of opportunity there and I can be more competitive, etc., so I said well okay. So I fell in love with Africa and I fell in love with Africa because of the people, basically the people, women, the role of women, how important are women in Africa and oral history was something that called my attention really, really, I mean incredibly. So I wrote my thesis, I ended up writing my thesis about South Africa, precisely; about the homelands andpolicies. So I read every single book and paper that was available at that time and he was my director of my thesis so then I ended up writing this thesis, I have it with me and then this was in 1985 and then I started working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for free because it was like an internship, and I knew about a programme atMexico which is the only...at that time it was the only place where you could study or follow a master's degree, get a master's degree in African studies. So I decided why not, I'm going to go for the master's degree and I studied for three years Africa, history, politics, economics, culture, everything about Africa for three years and I ended up writing my thesis about South Africa again; about the liberation movement; the ideology of the liberation movement.</p>
DR. MALKA	So you really have gone 360...
ABASSADOR	...so that's the background...yes, it's incredible...
DR. MALKA	...to be here...
ABASSADOR	<p>...and actually in 1991 I was working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs because I became a...well later I became a career diplomat in 1993 but before that I was the Head of the African Desk, in the first place I was a director, then I became Director General and then I will be Ambassador but before that, in 1991, I had the privilege to meet Madiba. Nelson Mandela was in Mexico in 1991 and I have a big picture with him and I actually in the presentation of my letters of credence I showed it to President Ramaphosa and I actually gave him a copy. He was very emotional and he was like...I really feel so privileged and I'm proud of that picture and have been able to meet him and to be with him four days, looking after him, it was really something. So it's like...it's like...it was in the making but I was not aware of that, I didn't know what was going to happen in my career, no?</p>
DR. MALKA	But it's amazing how the decisions you make; what the implications are going ahead in the future and to have been with Madiba, as a living legend at the time, must have been a phenomenal experience.
ABASSADOR FAJER	Yes it has been really, really determining in my career, I mean in my life of course, no. So you're right, yes you kind of make decisions with that orientation but I was not really aware of the decisions that I was making were going to result in being Ambassador to South Africa, this is like miraculous.
DR. MALKA	And as a career diplomat in this almost three decade long journey, besides the Africa highlights, what have been some of the significant milestones so far?
ABASSADOR FAJER	<p>Milestones I would say well my career is divided into two; the African piece which is...I've been involved in African affairs for twelve years, like that's half of my career and the other half has to do with North American affairs so it's a...it's a very good combination I would say and why did I do that and this is a milestone, it's a landmark in my career, because as part of the ...according to the law of the Foreign Service, every single career diplomat have to have an experience in the consular or field. Why? Because we have 10% of our population living in the United States; we have fifty (50) Consulates in the United States, so that's the size of the challenge we have</p>

	before us, so this is why 42% of career diplomats and workers in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are involved in North America, 42%. So this is why I ended up being Consul of Mexico to Minnesota, of all places in the world, Minnesota, there are 250,000 Mexicans living there...
DR. MALKA	...goodness me...
ABASSADOR	...and I had the privilege to serve my country, to represent my country as a Consul and it was a most amazing experience I've had because that really trains you and gives you a vision regarding the needs of the people and I learnt the needs of women migrants. I met them, I listened to them, to their concerns, to their realities and that's really, really touching, moving and it's like it...you get committed, you really realise how much they need the support, your support; obviously being a woman, even more, really even more, I was really close to them because they are hard workers. The numbers, the percentage of women migrants have increased in the last years, it has increased, before it was majority men and now it's almost the same or probably a little more women migrating from Mexico to...and now the rate is zero because now it's zero or negative. There are central American women and families and children and unaccompanied minors who are migrating through Mexico to get to the US, but that's but another topic.
DR. MALKA	Yes I think that's a story for a different day.
ABASSADOR FAJER	But women migrants were very, I mean for me really they changed my life I would say and my career was really touched by that, by that fact, by that experience.
DR. MALKA	It's a real human factor and understanding that the real needs of people who are not living in their home country but still need to connect, still need to liaise...
ABASSADOR FAJER	...exactly, yeah, and that was big part of our job there and one thing that we did at that time was to create a...we called it a window to give integral attention to women, it was... there were products tailor made for women. So that was very, very proactive initiative by a colleague of mine, a colleague of ours, a woman and she created this programme to give attention to women but specifically and a holistic approach toward women. But it's really very, very creative and proactive and very fortunate that women migrants, Mexican migrants can have that attention in the US, in the Consulates.
DR. MALKA	And given all of the experience over the years, all of the work that you've done with migrant women in particular, what do you think you're going to look at implementing in your role and I almost call you the Ambassador of Sub-Sahara for Mexico with all these different countries....
ABASSADOR FAJER	...yes...
DR. MALKA	...is there a particular focus, intent that you want to achieve during this tenure?
ABASSADOR FAJER	Yes well my plan, my working plan is pretty much focused on people to people connections, that's for me a key thing and obviously at the political level we have a bilateral commission, we have the mechanisms but people to people connections for me it's key and particularly women and young people, I think those are very important audiences and very important players in the country. As we were talking earlier, the media... the average age in Mexico is 26 years old and in South Africa it should be similar so there's a...I think a lot to do in that regard, promote dialogue...
DR. MALKA	...and a lot of commonalities I think in terms of some of the demography, some of the issues that you've experienced in the North American portfolio that there will be overlaps here.
ABASSADOR	Absolutely, absolutely, there are commonalities and we can share best

FAJER	practices and to learn from you, we have a lot to learn from South Africa and from all these countries. Their population, their challenges, they are similar but different as well, they are very particular and so I want to focus on that and mainly to take advantage of my experience at the bilateral level and at a regional level, negotiating agreements regarding women. That's another thing that I would like to bring that experience to South Africa and to my tenure here. Why? Because I worked a lot with the US and Canada with women entrepreneurs with particularly SME's, women business owners or women entrepreneurs, very young women entrepreneurs, so we signed an agreement and it's all about exchanging experiences, learning from each other and I realised that these kind of things, the agreements you reach with other countries, the agreements you reach at the multilateral level pushes you, pushes your country, your government to be signed and set up of public policies; public policies for the benefit of women. So because of these memorandums and because of for instance the commitment Mexico has acquired regardingthe commission on elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, because of that Mexico has designed the National Equity Policy and the other thing Mexico's government designed as well is this is the programme and the other thing is the norm for equality, labour equality and non-discrimination and these two things I think that have been really very innovative. Why? Because now there's an incentive to get their certification, to get their norm, not just in the public sector but also in the private sector and social sector. If you get that certification you get points, you get incentives, so this is like an affirmative action but it's very positive and you know give an impulse to be equal and to really non-discriminating business or government at the far level and also at the local level.
DR. MALKA	And I think that's so important. Some people will argue against quota's or affirmative action but they provide the opportunity; if you don't have that allocation you're excluded and I recall reading that in some of the work that's happening from a policy point of view in Mexico, when you've instituted this new legislation to try to get the equity of having 50% of candidates that are nominated as being female is that there were some men who were trying to claim that they were transgender...
ABASSADOR FAJER	...exactly...
DR. MALKA	...to be brought in as a female group...
ABASSADOR FAJER	...yes, exactly...
DR. MALKA	...so people always looking for loopholes to work it...
ABASSADOR FAJER	...exactly, that's incredible but finally and this is historic, in this election we reached parity and this is really outstanding and this is the result of the commitment of Mexico at the multilateral level because this...the parity in the Congress, now we have parity in the Congress, both in the Chamber of Representatives and in the Senate, this is a part of the re-political and electoral reform this is part of it and if you think about in 1955 women were granted the right to vote, in 1955, so it's not I mean that many years that this happened and now we have parity, this is really historic.....
DR. MALKA	...and also what I, you know, I like and how I look at this is that the legislation you mentioned passed in 2014...
ABASSADOR FAJER	...yes...
DR. MALKA	...which is only four years...
ABASSADOR	...exactly...

FAJER	
DR.MALKA	...and it takes time to build that and now you can really see the benefits and the positive impact by having 50/50...
ABASSADOR FAJER	...exactly...
DR.MALKA	...in this political status....
ABASSADOR FAJER	...exactly, exactly.
DR.MALKA	One of the other questions that I'd like to ask you and this relates to the empowerment and participation of women in the labour force and frequently you know we always talk about having greater diversity whether that's across gender, across age, sexual orientation, etc., of being more enriching, but what I've found in the private sector is that women still tend to be underpaid in comparison to men, earning on average 23% less. They work in lower ranking roles and they tend to be over-represented in unskilled labour force; could you give us a view of what it's like in the Mexican labour force, how women feature?
ABASSADOR FAJER	Yes, we have pretty much the same challenges, the same situation that you are describing and actually as part of OECD, we are country, member of OECD we are among the less developed country in terms of the participation of women in the workforce. There's 47% of women of working age that are part of the working...of the workforce and if you compare this 47% with 67%, which is the average in the OECD, it's really low, we have a challenge there, together with Turkey and Greece we are the three countries with less participation of women so this is a challenge, we have to really accelerate the incorporation of women into the workforce. The other thing and you are absolutely right, is the participation of women in top management roles, we don't have that, it's like...it's very few, it's very scarce, like 14.6 firms in Mexico, it's just 14.6% of firms, they have women participation in top management roles. So this is really...we have to do a better job in that regard.
DR. MALKA	And if this part of this is also attributed to the fact that quite often women and especially if we look 1955 being the year where women were able to vote in Mexico, that this is also attributed to the fact that women still have to manage the home environment....
ABASSADOR FAJER	...exactly...
DR. MALKA	...and if they wanted to go into the workforce this division of labour doesn't go away, the family still has to be attended to...
ABASSADOR FAJER	...absolutely yes. This is a challenge, absolutely. I would say motherhood is a challenge...
DR. MALKA	..it's almost a penalty sometimes..
ABASSADOR FAJER	...yes exactly. Teens pregnancy is another challenge. Gender violence is a huge thing as well and also the lack of facilities, of institutions for childcare, that's another challenge and those are recommendations by the OECD to Mexico to really promote affirmative action and do something very concrete and in terms of education and in the educational reform that was passed two years ago in Mexico as part of the structural reforms that were passed by the government, one is to set up a programme, some policies so children go to school in early stages. So this is something that is very positive for women and also to increase the number of institutions for childcare. There's a policy oriented towards preventing teens from getting pregnant because this is a huge problem as well and I know that you have a similar programme, right, in South Africa or in African countries teen

	<p>pregnancy it's huge. The other thing is stereotypes. Stereotypes that women do not tend for instance to go into career...men career, not traditionally men careers such as engineering, mathematics, technology, sciences, no, so the stem which is the science and technology is a priority now in Mexico. In Mexico everybody's really promoting girls to think out of the box and say yes I can, I can go into engineering and the numbers are growing but it's again, affirmative action, again campaigns, again scholarships focusing on girls, focusing on girls, that's a target audience now.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And something which I thought was quite unique and creative, I understand that you know I think it was sort of the sixties/seventies, maybe eighties where Mexico was suffering from an over population and how to try to educate the population from looking at contraception and to reduce fertility rates and then we had the introduction of the Telenovela's and I thought that was so fantastic of coming inside people's homes, talking in a language which people can relate to, part of the story line and making them consider or reconsider their own practices and I believe that had a tremendous impact...</p>
ABASSADOR FAJER	<p>...impact, yes...</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>...on levels...</p>
ABASSADOR FAJER	<p>...yes, you're right, that's ja....you remind me about this yes, yes, in fact it developed an impact, a consequence and it's like very friendly language and very like...</p>
DR.MALKA	<p>...passive in a way....</p>
ABASSADOR FAJER	<p>...yes passive and you touch a very important point regarding communications, how important are communications, how important is the internet, how important is all this..the role of communicationswomen is key, really, really key to play a constructive role in that regard because this is the way they really, I mean girls and women are inspired through communications and through sending this message of yes you can! Feel, believe in yourself, yes you can, you can do that, so it's very inspirational and yeah you're right, you remind me of a good practice that probably it was not created for that purpose in particular but it impacted positively.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>It worked.</p>
ABASSADOR FAJER	<p>It worked, yes exactly.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And I think, you know, when something works it's worth mining...</p>
ABASSADOR FAJER	<p>...it's worth it...</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>...that opportunity. You've mentioned education and I consider that to be a key skill and resource to contribute to women's empowerment and as we opened the conversation you shared your facets of education doing your master's in African Studies and I believe your doctorate studies were in Sociology. You've also shown how you've done this sort of 360 with your education to come into South Africa after starting and doing your thesis in it; can you share with us some of your views on education as a tool in the hands of women, not only to transform their own lives, but also the children.</p>
ABASSADOR FAJER	<p>Yes education is definitely the key, the key for every single thing really to access education, to promote education and in particular in the family; the household that is key. I have two sons, they are grown up and really I know they...for them it's natural, it's the normal thing, why I do...are you questioning me about being a woman, what is the difference or... and they really don't get it, they don't feel part of that generation in which they are</p>

	in with. They are questioning my role, I mean they are used to...it's a normal thing, it's a natural thing, so this is key I mean in the household, education, role models but if it cannot happen, to educate your sons and boys we have to educate them really in this in this culture, this equality and non-discriminatory culture.
DR. MALKA	And it starts from day one doesn't it?
ABASSADOR FAJER	From day one, absolutely. They watch you, no, you behave, but it's not easy usually I mean my case is not their case like the common thing, no it's not a common...still it will become a common thing, hopefully yes, but now it's not that common so for some women it's really challenging 'cause it's too...I mean it's a fight, no, usually or sometimes a fight with a partner or the husband regarding the role of women so....
DR. MALKA	... it could be even family, this debate....
ABASSADOR FAJER	...the family....
DR. MALKA	...and the conflict of your mother didn't do this or your grandmother didn't do this...
ABASSADOR FAJER	...exactly...divorce yes...
DR. MALKA	...and it's a conflict that one experiences trying to break away from the old and invest in the new....
ABASSADOR FAJER	...exactly, exactly, so education is definitely key; at school yes, access yes, but in the household..
DR. MALKA	...in the household....
ABASSADOR FAJER	...yes, that's really a priority.
DR. MALKA	Today we're talking to the Ambassador of Mexico, Ms Ana Luisa Fajer. We would love to receive your comments on Twitter:@WomanityTalk. Ambassador turning more towards a personal perspective, one of the questions that I ask all my guests on this show who've really made tremendous achievements in their respective disciplines is about some of the factors that they consider have contributed to their success. So some people speak about a particular figure in their lives or perseverance; I vividly recall one conversation where it was one of our famous singers Rebecca Malope and she said the fear of being poor was one of the things that drove her which I hadn't heard before; so if you can tell us in your experience what do you think have been some of the key factors for you?
ABASSADOR FAJER	I would say my grandmothers, both my father's mother and my mother's mother, they were such strong women. They were warriors, really warriors and my mother as well and the female factor in my family has played a big role. I have aunts who have been very...who have been very important in my life, they took care of me when my mother and father were travelling and it's really the female factor in my family is so, so strong. So I got that inspiration from them. I remember my grandmother she has Lebanese origin, she's from a Lebanese family and she obviously knows about trade and commercial affairs so she created her own bazaar in her house and sold things like she didn't care I mean she really was so self confident that she you know opened up the door of her house, everybody was you know coming and buying things like this perseverance, this spirit of hard workers, they are hard workers and also the idea of coming from a migrant family, this is also something that has really been an important factor in my life, why, because they...well I'm second generation Lebanese in Mexico, my grandfather migrated from Lebanon and arrived in Mexico in 1920 and I think I have it in the blood really, like this spirit of exploring

	<p>things and I'm a hard worker and yes everything is kind of difficult sometimes but you are going to get there and I have this feeling that yes it took me a while and it took a lot of effort from my side in terms of studying, preparing myself, perseverance definitely, hard working, hard working and one thing that I think it acts on the opposite side is the self-esteem. This is something that for me it was like a challenge, I didn't feel I could...sometimes I could do some things that I was obliged to prove the other that I could do it, that sensation like it was an impulse, a positive impulse but it's always feeling that this perception that it takes a lot of effort to get there. So I would suggest really other women to trust themselves, to believe in themselves and say yes, I can do that, I will do that and put aside the anxiety that it costs because that's quite an enemy, no, in terms of like to feel like this...getting rid of this myth that you have to do it all, no, you don't...to step aside of that myth that...because it's burdening...I mean you burn out in that effort so this is something that where it has been my experience in any case, no, my role models yes but this idea of it's hard because I'm a woman. It's hard because I'm a woman and I was not aware of being a woman is hard, I was not really aware of that.</p>
DR. MALKA	I think because you are a woman and that's part of the thing is that but this is who I am...
ABASSADOR FAJER	...yeah, who I am. But in my atmosphere, the atmosphere I grew up in I didn't feel it was a challenge. Later I found out that it obviously was a challenge, but later in my career.
DR. MALKA	...which is a good thing...
ABASSADOR FAJER	...it's a good thing...
DR. MALKA	...because you'd built the confidence, the self-esteem and not...and you knew where you were going to go...
ABASSADOR FAJER	...yes....
DR. MALKA	Can you share a few moments that were pivotal in your life growing up?
ABASSADOR FAJER	I would say my graduation in primary school, like I remember very well like going to quite another school. I was growing up and I wanted to study abroad, that was...at twelve years old I had very clearly the idea that I had to fight to go abroad, study abroad, learn languages for instance. At twelve years old I was aware of my need to discover the world and to discover through languages the world so I was studying French, English and then Swahili afterwards, like language is a very important part of my career...
DR. MALKA	...communication...
ABASSADOR FAJER	...communication exactly, but at twelve years old it was like a particular moment when I really knew that I wanted to go out there to the world and discover. France was the target at that time I remember that because French I love, I love French so France was like a target. So this was a very important time in my life. Obviously when my first son was born and then my second son, those were very important moments in my life, definitely. When I became...when I was promoted as an ambassador, this was really a feeling of yes, I could do that. I'm now an Ambassador to South Africa. It's amazing. So it's like a...very briefly like some very important moments. I'm an ambassador, I have the rank, I followedall the career I became the minister which is the last rank that you have to go through, exams, but you have to write a lot of papers, essays and be before a jury to defend your papers and I was promoted in October, last October and it took me only six months to become an Ambassador so I'm very

	happy.
DR. MALKA	Congratulations!
ABASSADOR FAJER	Thank you, thank you.
DR. MALKA	And lastly as we close out the show today, could you please share a few words of wisdom, inspiration or encouragement that you'd like to pass on to the young women..well all the women that are listening to us today?
ABASSADOR FAJER	Sure, well I would say sit at the table. Don't sit in the chairs that are behind the table, but sit at the table and be part of the decision making. Trust yourself. Be ambitious, go for it and really we have to I mean to get rid of anxiety. Really anxiety is a challenge and it's not the best thing, it's like the belief in I will do this, I will get there, with less anxiety. Less anxiety, more security in yourself and sit at the table.
DR. MALKA	I love that..."sit at the table."
ABASSADOR FAJER	Yes.
DR. MALKA	Thank you so much for joining us today, it's been a real pleasure having you on the show, hearing your views and we truly wish you all the very, very best in your new portfolio not only in South Africa but also the myriad of other countries that you're responsible for.
ABASSADOR FAJER	Thank you so much for the invitation.
	PROGRAMME END