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**GUEST NAME: ROBINA MARKS – SOUTH AFRICA’S HIGH COMMISSIONER TO SRI LANKA**

<b>SPEAKER</b>	<b>TRANSCRIPTION</b>
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 today is South Africa’s High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, Robina Marks, who also represents South Africa in the Maldives, Bangladesh as well as Nepal. Welcome to the show!
<b>HC MARKS</b>	<b>Thank you so much; it’s a pleasure to be here.</b>
DR. MALKA	High Commissioner you’re no stranger to Asia, having served previously as South Africa’s High Commissioner to Thailand, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia; can you please share with us a few of the landmarks in your career and what attracted you to a diplomatic career?
<b>HC MARKS</b>	<b>That’s really an interesting question because it had me think back very deeply, you know. When you are poor and I grew up you know in a single headed household; my mother was a domestic worker for white people in apartheid South Africa and we, you know, we grew up in moving from different backyard dwellings and when you are poor you are focused on survival, you’re not thinking about a strategy, you don’t really have a plan and so life tends to happen to you, you know, and so it was never part of my...of my future idea for myself to be a diplomat. In any case, if I had to think of a typical profile of a diplomat it was always someone who was a white and male and wearing a suit and of course someone who’s able, you know, physically able and middle class and I represented everything that was opposite to that and so because I couldn’t see someone like me occupying that position, it was very difficult to imagine myself within that. But in a strange way, with the kind of work that I’ve been doing; my passion, my activism for community politics, my involvement in the struggle against apartheid; all of those gave me a set of values which said that I wanted to give and I wanted to serve and I wanted to help to make South Africa a better place and I was fortunate that I then placed myself into situations where I worked for community organisations, NGO’s who were committed to entrenching values of democracy and justice and fairness and so from that small little circle, you know, of community work that expanded into what had now become a sphere of influence in the rest of the world. So yeah, that’s how the journey began.</b>
DR. MALKA	It’s such an important journey and I would say very, very contrasting from what your early beginnings were to where you are now.
<b>HC MARKS</b>	<b>I think I’m still astonished when I look back at the journey that I’ve travelled. I think that many of my friends at school, you know, would have said she’s the least likely to succeed because she was always found marching, you know, or demonstrating, etc., etc. But I believe if you have a strong set of values and principles that speaks to finding ways wherever you can to influence and impact on the world to make it a better place, then I think that that is what guides you eventually into finding a formal space where you can turn your anger into a strategy, into a plan, into an action, you know, that can lead to change. So for me it starts with being very clear</b>

	<p>about who I am, what I stand for, my values as a diplomat, you know, I stand for things like integrity, patriotism, humility, loyalty as well. Those are the things that guides me and I think that that also then explains why it is that I play a particular type of role and I perform my duties as a diplomat in a particular way as well because I think it's important that we move away from the old conception of what a diplomat is. We don't just attend cocktail parties and eat Ferrero Rocher chocolates and drink, you know, lots and lots of glasses of red wine, you know, we are networking, we are facilitators, we are selling what our country has to offer and so I'm trying consciously to perform what it means to be a diplomat differently. Of course I still observe protocol but I can also take off my pearls and my stilettos, you know, and go on a march with the women in the north of Sri Lanka, you know, women who have had their realities disappeared through the 30 year civil war. So I think it's an exciting time to be a female diplomat; I think that we are able to recreate what it means to be a diplomat, to make it more accessible for ordinary people. But also to remind people that it is possible to be an ambassador wherever you are, whether you are a school kid who's fighting or speaking up against bullying, you know, you can speak for others, so I don't want us to think...to have a very narrow definition of what it means to be an ambassador, you know, you can be an ambassador for any cause that you are passionate about.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And you've broken the mould; you've changed what the stereotypical view is of what an ambassador is or was when you were growing up by walking in those footsteps and becoming the person you are today. We've spoken a little bit about the importance of action; we've spoken about how you're going to execute your role in a different way; can you share with us some of the key challenges and what your main objectives are during this term of office?</p>
HC MARKS	<p>For me it's really I mean firstly, you know, we are exporting the values that animates our constitution. The values that animates our South African constitution speaks to issues like non-discrimination, equality, women's empowerment, justice and fairness and for me it's very important that you know 24 years after the attainment of our democracy that the values that drove our new South Africa does not become separated from our daily practice and I'm saying this because values is essentially what drives our foreign policy as well. Some call it a form of soft diplomacy but it's what we try to infuse within our foreign policy, the way in which we work with other countries. The particular...because one of our strong skills because we've gone through a reconciliation process, we are able to bring opposing sides together. We are very good facilitators, we are excellent mediators and of course as a woman, you know, I've been socialised to mediate, not always in terms that was favourable to my own development because my socialisation taught me to be a nice, quiet, smiling, agreeable, amiable girl, but in ways that I have transformed in the world of diplomacy because one of the skills that we have as women, we as diplomats, we are very, very good at what I call parallel track diplomacy and that essentially means that we can negotiate quite hard, you know, in a negotiating room, at the UN or the AU we have represented South Africa in the past but at the same time we can use our socialisation as a transformative tool to lobby, to cajole, to persuade, you know, etc., etc. And so there's a way, there's a quality that we bring to how we engage with countries, particularly when we are trying to bring two sides together and I've been in situations, you know, in Thailand I was there when the coup took place; the military coup took place and we assisted them, supported them in having a conversation because of course we do not want a return of the strong military man, you</p>

	<p>know. We want democracy to be sustained, you know, we want constitutions to be regarded as something that is respected and in the same way in Myanmar where I was also accredited, you know, we brought together different opposing groups together and we brought some people out from South Africa to help, you know, the different ethnic groups to come together and it's the same thing we are doing in Sri Lanka as well. And so in a wonderful way I've been privileged to use my experience of having grown up in apartheid South Africa and having been a member of a liberation movement that was the oldest in Africa and also having been in prison as well and having that particular experiences that helped to prepare me for seeing how important it is to bring people together, to have a conversation, you know, and so I'm fortunate that I've been placed in situations like those countries that I've just mentioned and particularly of course lately now in Sri Lanka where we have been able to use that skill to quite good effect, you know.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>So these were almost, one would regard them as negative skills which you developed because of the circumstances that you were in but you've been able to put them through on a very positive strategy to derive direct benefit in new situations and particularly what's coming through is about the consultative aspect, the mediating effects and ensuring that there is an outcome which is achieved without aggression; that everyone's on the same table. One of the things that I wanted to ask you; our programme is all about gender equality which is increasingly a global focus and building female leadership capacity is becoming more and more important, not just from a South African point of view but from a global context; you've held roles in both private and the public sector; you've specialised in identity politics, diversity management, restorative justice and gender mainstreaming; given these types of experiences, how do you see female leadership, whether it's in the private sector, public sector, academia or any other field for that matter?</p>
HC MARKS	<p>It's something that's of essential value that I absolutely believe in but at the same time, you know, let me start like this; I'll tell you a little story. In 1992 I was one of South Africa's representatives to the Beijing World Conference on women and I was you know young, starry eyed, bushy tailed, you know, I really thought that we were going to change the world and we were going to do it right there because we had such a powerful group of women from across the world together and now, more than two decades later, I thought that by now I would have retired and I would have a lavender garden and grow olives or...and not talk about gender anymore. Instead I'm still talking about women's empowerment, gender equality, the need for women's leadership and so we would have to ask that why is it that this ideology that is called patriarchy, you know, has been able to be so resilient, so tenacious, so persistent and that has been able to reshape itself, even in South Africa where we have an equity discourse; we've got policies, you know, that speaks to 50% of women in leadership and decision making, you know, we've got a ruling party who set a benchmark, a quota for women into local government and into senior government as well. Why is it that we...that we still have this sticky floor syndrome for so many women? And a bit of history also about our particular department; I was the first gender focal person appointed within this department ten years ago and when I started we only had 23% of women who were ambassadors at the time. By time that I left to be an ambassador we stood at 33% and I've just checked now; we now stand at 37.1%. With senior management when I started ten years ago we were at 18%; we are now at 43.1%, so clearly, you know, we have made progress over the years but it needs political will. In our case what has been incredibly important is that we had a succession of</p>

three female foreign ministers who were very, you know, we regarded gender....women's empowerment and gender equality as critical and unless you have political will that drives, you know, efforts to mentor women in an inter-management, you know, who makes sure that they are enabling mechanisms in place to support them....I've just been to the ladies bathroom just now and I just saw one evidence of what I had fought for so hard, you know, ten years ago. I was saying that as we were designing this beautiful building, stunning building, I said....I asked for two things, so one – a room where women who were lactating could go and you know express milk and I was, you know, the men were sniggering and laughing and they were saying what if we drink the milk by mistake, you know, completely ridiculous. I also asked that all of our meeting rooms should have some kind of modesty panel, you know, so that when women sit, you know we call it mansplaning; when men spread but African women have a particular build of course, which we are very proud of and so there's a womansplaning that takes place and so of course you need some kind of modesty panel because those kind of things all contribute to a sexualised environment in which women become vulnerable and I can see quite clearly that those things are in place right now. So the departments are making you know very strong steps to make sure that we have more women in senior positions but we still have the majority of women stuck at the bottom, you know, and so there's a hierarchy, there's a triangle almost, you know, where black women are stuck in lower positions and a few of us are able to progress and that is why when I was here I started a mentoring programme called 'Lift As You Climb' because I said it's very, very important that those of us who have been able to get into the senior positions within the organisations, we have a particular responsibility to develop access and opening some opportunities for other women as well and so we had a wonderful mentoring programme where women in senior management, you know, was mentoring young women within the department and that worked very, very well. But I also want to caution, I mean I want to congratulate us that we have been able to go this far in terms of numbers, but I also want to say that feminine mass, you know, does not always translate into feminist acts and I think it's very, very important that we recognise that women are also implicated and enmeshed and I've learnt what it means to be a woman and a leader, you know, from an organisational practice that is male you know and so for us to just look at numbers and ignore what the impact or the consequence or the translation of the numbers is in better outcomes for women would also be a mistake. So numbers for me is absolutely necessary but it's not sufficient to ensure the type of gender transformation within any institution that will ensure that gender equality is routinised, you know, it's not something that we are surprised about anymore. I think it's very important that women bring their gender with them into the room, you know, I think that it would be foolish for me to say that I'm South African and that's where it ends. I have to say that I am a South African and my location is also, you know, part of an intersecting set of identities; I am female, you know, I am physically able for the moment, I am a, you know, I am a rural class woman, I am a light skinned black woman which also privileges me in a particular way in a world that is so racist, you know, so I have to....I have to recognise the set of privileges that I have and find ways of using that to also get other women in, you know, into management. I do not want to be exceptional; I would hate to look around and see that I am the only woman in the room, it's not a source of pride, it's a source of shame if that happens.

DR. MALKA	So there's the quantitative aspect of getting the numbers through and the stat's you've just described really show a clear trend of succession. I, like you, have dwelt on Beijing and thought that it would be a case of almost flipping the switch; 30% is going to come in; a decade down the line; 50% and for most sectors we're still under the 30% level. What do you think went wrong from Beijing?
HC MARKS	<b>I really just think its patriarchy. I think we underestimated its strength. I think that we underestimated its ability to be a shape shifter, you know, so that even if you....if a formal talk is gender equality, you know, I've now discovered that I mean I think that there is a, you know, there's certain terms and concepts that's trendy over the years and gender equality became one of the criteria with the hallmarks of good governance and responsible government as well and so gender became a tick mark that says that you were doing something, you know, and so there's a glass hole between policy speak and policy do, you know, and it's within that gap you know that women...that women fail and the question has to be asked did we fall or were we pushed, you know, and I believe very, very strongly that we were pushed. I believe, you know, many people talk about gender but I think still extremely important to talk about women's only programmes. I love the work that the feminists in the 70's and the 60's were doing; the consciousness raising workshops where we talked about ourselves, about who we are, where we were able to surface all of those aspects of our socialisation that enabled us to develop a feminist consciousness of what....of how we wanted to, you know, how we wanted to enter the workforce, you know, run our own companies, etc., and I almost feel as if in the current way in which feminism is understood and practised, you know, there's a step that we are missing where we work....where we recognised fundamentally that the personal is also profoundly political, you know, and that it's okay for women to meet on their own, you know. I think that we need men as partners, I think it's completely necessary but I also think that we need women's only spaces where we can talk about the kind of inhibiting factors within ourselves, you know, what we were taught because the world was interpreted for us by our parents who were also socialised, you know, and so how we perform, what it means to be a woman is a space that sometimes needs a little bit of space just between women.</b>
DR. MALKA	And often that world was interpreted through the lens of a man because the world had been created by men.
HC MARKS	<b>Yes, absolutely, and so but still I do think it's important that men are partners but I also want us to recognise that, you know, when we talk about gender mainstreaming, our experience in institutionalised in gender government departments have proven for me, without a shadow of a doubt, that gender mainstreaming, it's a male stream, it's a slipstream, it's a stream where women drown, you know, and it's a stream that doesn't say what is the specific impact of our budget within our department, of our provision of housing; what are the impacts of those things differentially, you know, on the lives of women and men and as long as we don't disaggregate, as long as we lump women and men together as a marginest group, we're never going to be able to understand why we're not going forward.</b>
DR. MALKA	You've been on the job for a considerable period of time; you bring a wealth of experience within the gender space; you've had opportunities to observe of where our downfalls are; looking towards the future, what do you think we need to do in order to improve or benefit women of the future?

HC MARKS	<p>I think it starts with us in the way in which we conceptualise feminism. You know I come from a generation that believes in binary opposites, you know, male/female, and now we have this wonderful new confident assertion that there are all kinds of ways of being a woman, you know, and so one of the conversations that I think that we need to have as feminists is how do we create a feminism that includes, you know. We have an LGBT plus community out there who still don't see themselves as part of this movement for change and I think that many feminists are scared of entering into that conversation because we've spent so many years talking about, you know, men and women and patriarchy etc. and now we're adding another dimension but I think that going forward, I think that because I work outside of the country one of the things that I do quite consciously is to work with women in my countries of accreditation. I create sister to sister solidarity between women's groups in South Africa and women's groups in Sri Lanka, in Myanmar, in Bangladesh now, etc., etc. I think it's only once we understand the universality (if there's such a word) that patriarchy is universal that affects all of us in the same ways but through a different medium of culture, ethnicity or religion. I think that it starts first of all with us creating that sense of solidarity and I think that the Hashtag movement is probably one of the most exciting, innovative things that has happened to feminism because it has allowed us to have a new conversation. The Hashtag phenomenon worries me at the same time because you can't have an in-depth...you can't mobilise on social media, you can mobilise emotion, but can we translate that emotion into a movement, you know, that can sustain and fight for peace? So I'm still hopeful but I would still like to retire into my lavender garden and grow olives, if I could.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>There is too much work to be done before you get to have that luxury but I'm sure it will happen. Could you tell us a little bit more about the dynamics of those almost sisterhood groups that are taking place, what types of positive outcomes they've yielded?</p>
HC MARKS	<p>In South Africa, you know, a while ago we had a number of xenophobic attacks where South Africans were feeling, quite mistakenly, you know threatened by the influx of economic migrants from the rest of Africa and what we did was to create social dialogues, you know, we created women's peace around tables and we invited women from Bangladesh and from South Africa, affected communities to talk about you know what were the driving factors, why were in the country, you know, what do we have in common because it's really just about...it's about poverty that drives people to leave, no-one wants to leave their home, you know, they are driven because they are seeking better opportunities and so at the level of grassroots we've created little communities in dialogue; women talking to each other that has led to greater understanding, greater tolerance and I've learnt recently that those women actually protect the Pakistani and Bangladeshi shopkeepers should there be an attack, you know. It's still very small but that's the kind of social movement and consciousness of caring for each other, of recognising that we all face a common enemy and that is poverty, you know, and that our future or wellbeing depends on us focusing on eradicating poverty and unemployment and inequality and if we hold hands around that, then that's a good way to move forward.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And you've brought, in my mind, aspects of social cohesion, a qualitative value and you've been very strong about your values throughout our conversation today and I think those are important principles which are enduring and endearing that will help galvanise communities together. Now turning towards</p>

	<p>more of a personal perspective, as we come towards the end of the show, one of the questions that I ask all my guests who've made significant contributions in their respective fields of expertise are about some of the factors that they consider have contributed to their success. So some people speak about hard work, perseverance or a particular person in their life; could you please share with us what have been some of your factors of success?</p>
<p><b>HC MARKS</b></p>	<p><b>I think it's, you know, I am 55 years old, I was born in 1963; I was born a year after Nelson Mandela was imprisoned and so I was born in a decade where there were group areas act, we were removed from where we were living as a family because we were classified as so-called coloured, you know, you had strikes that happened, you had the riots of the Union Movement in the 70's. During the 80's I was very much part of the school...of the Student Movement and in the 90's I'm part of the generation that saw the end of apartheid, you know, of course standing on the shoulders of many people who had gone before. And so social, context, social consciousness is shaped, you know, by the situation in which you are born into; you can't ignore politics. But to return a little bit more pertinently to your question, my shaping influence has definitely been poverty. My mother was a domestic worker, we didn't have permanent housing, we lived from one back yard to the other. I was determined to survive my life, I knew that no-one was going to come and rescue me. My mother told me from an early age of the man is not a plan so it was very clear that I had to rescue myself and I grabbed opportunities. I had wonderful role models, my mother was an extremely funny, strong woman but I also had role models like Mama Ruth Mompoti, you know, she's passed away now but she also served...because before we were of course formally allowed to be diplomats we were frontline diplomats, we were representing the liberation movement in other countries and Mama Ruth Mompoti, for example, she served in a few countries for the ANC and she would always greet you by saying "my child what did you do for our people today?" so she's the one strong influence for me; there's also Dulcie September who was also classified as so-called coloured, she was a teacher, she was an ANC representative in Paris and she was the first diplomat from South Africa to be assassinated in the 60's and she was a strong, fearless patriot, you know, and then of course there's Winnie Mandela, you know, someone who has been vilified to such an extent in the press, by the mainstream media and yet she was a survivor. She was...she's one of my Shero's, you know, and then I've had three female ministers you know, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma who became the first female AU president. She was the one who really pushed and pioneered, getting more female ambassadors in to be sent out into the world, then, of course, she was followed up by Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, who, during her presidency....because we had the presidency of COP 17 and she made it one of the cornerstones of our campaign to develop a declaration for women where we said what did we want from climate change and I remember that I went with her from, you know, to different provinces; we convened her Africa Consultative Meeting, a South African one, an international one as well. And then lately of course Minister Sisulu who occupied very non-traditional roles for women. Normally they give women positions in soft positions but she was minister of defence, she was minister of housing, she was minister of intelligence and now she's in, you know, in foreign affairs and she does it with....you know, she performs being a minister very differently as well, you know, and I'm intrigued by that because she's smart, she's beautiful, she's articulate, you know, and people are looking for a black suite and she's saying this is who I am, you know, and this is</b></p>

	<p>how we do diplomacy, you know, on our own terms. And so I love that unapologetic way of her of presenting herself as a strong, able, beautiful, intelligent woman, you know, female minister to the world. So I'm fortunate I always find role models in women and I've been lucky that I have been promoted by women, I'm very proud of that because normally when women get into positions of power the first question is did you sleep with someone, you know, and I believe that our integrity, our personal integrity is everything, you know, so I cling to women, you know, I hold onto them and they've never let me down.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>It sounds like you are living out the whole concept you introduced at the gender focal point of 'lift as you climb'.</p>
HC MARKS	<p>I try to, I try very much so. I'm conscious now, I used to be a very reluctant role model, firstly because I also suffered like many women from imposter syndrome, you know, am I really here, you know, so I struggled to overcome that. One thing that I still struggle with is a sense of survivor's guilt, you know, because I should never have been in this position, you know, and that guilt is something that I've transformed into a much stronger commitment to work harder, you know, to find ways all the time to expand the small spaces that I'm sometimes given in order to make a change and to make a difference and I also spend a lot of time, you know, just doing work with young women. When I was in Thailand I was recognised by the royal family for the work that I was doing with young vulnerable women and I was given a medal by the princess and now in Sri Lanka I do the same thing. I've started a little campaign where we collect sanitary towels and give it to poor orphan girls who were affected by the war and so wherever I go I try consciously to be, you know to be a visible role model, which is tough because sometimes a girl wants to, you know, just let her hair down, but ja, we've got a task to do, so....</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And I think one of the big messages and takeouts that I've had to day in the conversations today is about sacrifice and sacrifice of oneself for the greater good of being able to serve others. They may not know what you're giving up but you know that what you're doing is going to make an impact on their lives.</p>
HC MARKS	<p>Absolutely, that's the legacy that I want to leave behind. I'm a mother, you know, I'm a mother without children and so for me I try and find ways in which to leave behind a legacy, you know, I try to find ways in which I can leave something behind that people can look back and say you know she was the first in her family but she was able to achieve this and I think that's important. Legacy is not just, you know, your parents leaving you money, you know, which would be nice of course, but legacy can also be what your mother leaves you; a sense of resilience, of commitment, a sense of, you know, of standing up for yourself, you know, that's also the type of legacy that we can build within ourselves and within others as well.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And finally, as we close out our conversation today, could you please share a few words of wisdom or inspiration that you'd like to impart to young ladies listening to us on the continent?</p>
HC MARKS	<p>You must do the thing that you think you cannot do. You must always do the thing that you think that you cannot do; this is not original, it was something that was said by Eleanor Roosevelt and I don't know a lot about politics but it's something that I believe in because when I did the things that I thought I couldn't do I had my greatest reward, you know. The other one that I also live by is just that we of course, I said that you know, here the favourite from Madeleine Albright, you know, where she said there's a special place in hell for women who don't help or care for other women. I think those things are very important for me. I think that we live</p>



	<b>in a world that is extremely cynical about women supporting each other. I think that we live in a world that wants to pit us against each other and I think it's important for us to have a simple naive belief that as women, you know, we have the same common issues, the same common enemy, which is not men but patriarchy and if we hold hands together and find our shared values, you know, our shared goals, we can overcome.</b>
DR. MALKA	Thank you so much for joining us; it's been a pleasure having you on our show today.
<b>HC MARKS</b>	<b>It's my pleasure, thank you Doctor.</b>
DR. MALKA	And we wish you all the very best to a day of lavender fields and olive groves.
<b>HC MARKS</b>	<b>Come and join me, you're more than welcome!</b>
	<b>PROGRAMME END</b>