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PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

EVENT: 10TH BRICS SUMMIT

GUESTS: KAMINA JOHNSON-SMITH - JAMAICA'S MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND FOREIGN TRADE;

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 Sandton, South Africa, at the 10 th BRICS Summit held under the theme of BRICS IN AFRICA – Collaboration for Inclusive Growth and Shared Prosperity in the Fourth Industrial Revolution is Jamaica's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade; Kamina Johnson-Smith. Welcome to the show!
MINISTER JOHNSON-SMITH	Thank you so much for having me, good morning!
DR. MALKA	Minister, by profession you are an attorney at law, with approximately 15 years at the Jamaican bar. In 2014 you opened your own law firm after serving as Company Secretary and Head of Corporate Affairs and Projects of Cable and Wireless Jamaica Limited and then in 2016 you were appointed to Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Jamaica; can you please tell us about your shift from law to politics?
MINISTER JOHNSON-SMITH	Well it wasn't so much a shift as a gentle transition because the fact is that while in 2016 I was appointed Minister, it is in fact my third term as a senator, so it has actually been an aspect of public service that I have incorporated into my life since 2009. I think that the two work well together because a good understanding of legal structure and legislation; how it is drafted, what...the problems that actually manifest in daily life when things are not clearly expressed, these are skill sets that I think help phenomenally in being a strong parliamentarian.
DR. MALKA	And that dovetails into one of the questions that I'm going to ask you a little bit later in terms of the skill set and how that balance looks at understanding of opportunities to change legislation if need be. So staying with your current role, as minister of foreign affairs and foreign trade; what does your work entail and are there any specific milestones you want to achieve in this term?
MINISTER JOHNSON-SMITH	Okay. What's actually interesting is that I'm not only Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade and I will mention the first woman to hold that role in Jamaica, as this is a gender programme, but I am also leader of government business in the senate, so I am charged in that role with being responsible for the governments legislative agenda, setting their...ensuring that each week we pass the laws and the regulations that are important to the governments priorities. In respect of foreign affairs and foreign trade I would say we have a broad range of initiatives which we wish to undertake, but if I'd highlight three, I would say the launching of our national foreign trade policy; we felt it was important to ensure that we have a renewed and modern, fitful purpose national trade policy and action plan and that has just been approved by parliament...sorry, approved by cabinet and will now be tabled in parliament in short order;

	<p>so implementation of that is one of my priorities. The finalisation of a national policy on our Diaspora; how it is that we incorporate, engage and empower our Diaspora as well as harness their economic and human capacity for national development, that is another priority, as well as a national consular policy which should standardise the ways in which our different missions across the world are...how they service the needs of our nationals who live overseas and set expectations, both for service delivery and for what our people can expect from our missions overseas as we are a small economy with limited resources. These are three of our priorities.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And given all that you've said, maybe a small economy, but we're all talking on a global level, on a global scale on these collaborations of populations living across the world.</p>
MINISTER JOHNSON-SMITH	<p>Absolutely and it's ironic as we look at treating with our Diaspora overseas also we are here in South Africa are feeling a great sense of the reality that we are also a part of Africa's Diaspora and engaging here through BRICS, through ACP as we have for many years, these are ways in which we strengthen that link and we hope to strengthen those links through our bilateral discussions with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade and between your president and our prime minister later today.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Besides your official portfolio, you also have a keen interest in governance, education, youth and gender affairs and you have successfully tabled parliamentary motions regarding public sector governance as well as the re-integration of teen mothers in the formal school system and I'd like to talk a little bit about the re-integration of teen mothers and I think it's such an important view, that just because someone is pregnant or just because someone has had a child it can't impinge on their life going forwards and they shouldn't be denied these opportunities. I mean education, world over, we hear studies from UNESCO where an additional year of schooling equates to a 10% greater yield in income, it also shows benefits in terms of reduction in mortality rates, looking at how women improve or how they manage their fertility rates as well; so could you just tell us a little bit more behind this?</p>
MINISTER JOHNSON-SMITH	<p>Sure, this is a matter on which I became quite passionate having learnt of the issue at a UNFBA conference some years ago, several years ago, when I was in opposition and a spokesperson on education and youth and it struck me that the economic cycle that we were in and that we were placing ourselves in by not treating with the issue of adolescent pregnancy was just shocking and it appeared that we needed to change the conversation because my understanding from discussions with stakeholders in Jamaica and elsewhere, was...seemed to be that every time the topic came up it became a moralistic discussion and not a discussion whether about human rights; a or b; the economic realities of the cost to an economy of a woman who are unprepared for children, having too many, the statistic that it is quite clear that a woman who's education is...or child who's education is interrupted by pregnancy is more than likely, I think it's three times as likely, to have repeat pregnancies and to not enter the formal economy. The ramifications for that to our developing economy are exponential and changing this conversation to one which perhaps removed some of the more sensitive and personal and subjective discussions helped expand a broad range of persons or include rather a broad range of persons in the discussion and helped I think people to see and rally around the fact that it's a necessity. It's still a controversial issue to some extent but we were able to ensure that there was policy change and recognition of the fact that it was in fact an</p>

	<p>important economic indicator, adolescent pregnancies, and that it needed to be addressed. The good thing is that Jamaica has been maybe light years ahead of some other countries by having an organisation, Women's Centre Foundation of Jamaica, that have been trying to integrate young girls, for years, that had been integrating for years and offering some remedial training to them once they had gotten pregnant; they could go to them and get support. But the issue was that they were having an uphill battle getting the girls back into school, so the issue was we needed the education system to change its policy to recognise that they had a right to their space because another inequality that was produced is that boy was never excluded. It was only, you know, these are not immaculate conceptions but the girl would be excluded and be seen of course you know in this sort of bearing the sins of Eve, as if pregnancy is contagious and not looking at the realities that these are actually socio-economic issues that have to be dealt with more holistically and educating girls is of infinite more value than punishing them.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>It's like being able to rationalise an argument which crosses these moral boundaries and moral boundaries can't supersede logic.</p>
MINISTER JOHNSON-SMITH	<p>No absolutely and sometimes it's a function of changing the conversation. I think that one of the things that we as women who advocate for empowerment and different rights is that we must also be careful to allow our narratives to develop and not become so rooted in a particular point of view or way of expressing that right that changing needs, changing messages, changing ears and changing persons at the table are not able to be absorbed in the conversation to move more of us forward.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>I mentioned earlier about your legal background and clearly it is an advantage in being able to pursue and challenge legislative changes, now our programme 'Womanity – Women in Unity' as you may have gathered by the name is all about gender equality and it's increasingly becoming a global focus and sometimes one issue that tends to be controversial is about gender quotas in the workplace and it's not universally accepted, yet, with interviews with I'd say some of the African Continent's famed female leaders from former president of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma; they argue it's a necessity to promote equality and increase the ratio of women in decision making roles; could you please share your perspective on legislation in terms of driving behavioural change?</p>
MINISTER JOHNSON-SMITH	<p>Right, I may not be the best person to ask because Jamaica was one of the countries, in fact we were found by the ILO in 2015 to have per capita, the largest number of women managers in the world. We are...80% of our supreme court judges are women; 50% of our appellate court judges are, and I think maybe 80% of our resident magistrates which are the local level and the largest segment of the judiciary, are women and these are all areas which have been predominantly, well dominated by men for years. We have tertiary institutions that are graduating, an average of 64% women, in fact our largest university graduated 75% women and there's some who actually say that this is causing a social dissonance to...well it is causing a socio-economic imbalance and some even say making it harder for women to find partners who they view as true partners in life building. So we are looking at issues in terms of our male drop-outs in school while we also look at empower of women. There are issues that we believe, by the way well I must say it's upfront that our policy of our national gender equality policy which we passed in 2011, when we also entrenched freedom from discrimination under the sub of sex, that policy provides for 30% minimum of women in the senate and it also provides for us to work</p>

	<p>towards 30% otherwise; on public boards etc. In practice we now try to get one third in the public board sector, most of all permanent secretaries, that is the highest administrative level in government, are women and this has happened by continuous promotion or rather a fundamental belief in the importance of education and the fact that our women and our girls are well educated from primary all the way up and in fact are more likely to stay in school than boys. So there's a foundation that once that is created we feel that once there are no barriers there is room for upliftment and that is what has been manifesting in Jamaica.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>It's certainly been a positive benefit seeing this pipeline of development, going through their education, opening those opportunities and then embracing those opportunities. Now staying with the gender agenda; building female leadership capacity is incredibly important for the future of women and if we look at even the things that you've mentioned now, you're now seeing women occupying roles which were traditionally dominated by men but one area is when we look at heads of state and to be frank there have not been many female heads of state. Jamaica has had a female head of state, Portia Simpson-Miller, Australia, Julia Gillard, in Africa we've had Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Joyce Banda – Malawi, Theresa May, Angela Merkel, but they're literally a handful. What is your opinion of female leadership in politics and do you think more countries are ready for a female president or prime minister?</p>
MINISTER JOHNSON-SMITH	<p>Well I think that the world is ready and not so much that the world is ready, I think that the world needs more female leadership. I think the fact that you're able to name, to run off a list of female leaders shows that there are not enough, that we are not enough, but in terms of a country's readiness, that is...that's sort of the crux of democracy in that a country elects the leaders which it wants to see at the forefront and an important part of that process I think is for us as women to ensure that we are moving ourselves, empowering our sisters, opening doors as we move up and keeping them open, so when a door is open for us we have to keep the door open and help other young women through so that there is this pipeline, because as people see, as....because it requires a cultural shift in many other countries that don't have them it is because the culture needs to shift and part of that culture shift is men and women, men and women seeing women as leaders. So it is not...from my perspective, it is not something that could or should be legislated, it is something that must come through empowerment, through visibility, through good old public relations. I think that this is one of the areas where NGO's play a great role as well in advocacy and in training. One of the things, one of the programmes that we have which I think is just fantastic in Jamaica is called Women's Leadership Initiative and Young Women's Leadership Initiative. So what it does is it tries to help girls from secondary level see themselves as leaders and it encourages them, instead of running for like PR and secretary in their student council which are in your class monitoring system, and those are great and valuable positions as well, but run for president, don't only run for vice-president, run for president, you know, don't seek to limit yourself or to only see your male colleagues as the leaders because they see themselves that way already because that's how the books, the socialisation, that's how it runs. We have to therefore implement programmes like this one, so it takes youngsters secondary and tertiary levels and involves them in training and mentorship so that they see themselves as leaders, they run for the positions which makes them more likely to get involved in politics when they leave school and that is part of the cultural shift as well. Getting your peers to vote for you and to select you when you're young or rather when you're still in school and it</p>

	becomes a mindset that permeates through society as you then graduate and that I think is part of how we get there. Cultural shift, ja.
DR. MALKA	Everything we've spoken about today reminds me of this almost ethos of rewiring. So we've spoken about changing the moral perspective when we're looking at issues of teen pregnancies or adolescent pregnancies and how it is always the girl's fault; we're also now looking I think more importantly about how we can transition cultures and for women to see that the sky is the limit. In closing the conversation today, could you share a few words of wisdom to our young ladies that are listening to us?
MINISTER JOHNSON-SMITH	A few words of wisdom. Believe in yourself; work hard; nothing substitutes for hard work. Make sure you do your research. Understand the context within which you're operating, within which you're speaking, within which you're engaging and ensure that you are prepared, nothing beats preparation. Don't try to wing it because it looks cool. If you need notes, carry them, if you need to discuss before, discuss. Understand what works for you and how it is that you are your best self, at the end of the day you can be anything you wish to be if you just work hard.
DR. MALKA	Fantastic, thank you so much.
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