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PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: PROFESSOR KINTA BURGER – REGISTRAR OF THE 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 in Johannesburg is Professor Kinta Burger who is the Registrar of the University of Johannesburg; she has held this position since 2014. Prior to this appointment she was the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Sciences at the University of Johannesburg for nearly a decade. She is passionate about the fields of science, engineering and technology and the underlying language of mathematics. Welcome to the show!
PROF BURGER	Thank you very much Doctor, it is my pleasure to be here!
DR. MALKA	To begin with, you've been the Registrar at the University of Johannesburg for going on the past five years; can you share with us a little bit more about the work that you do as well as the responsibilities that come with holding this position?
PROF BURGER	Registrar at the University is that person that sometimes you don't get to know at all unless you have some sort of trouble with your you know, studies because a registrar is responsible for the academic administrative life-cycle of students. So it is from student recruitment as new students, it has to do with application processes, then the registration; then it is about making sure that students can have a curriculum, so it's about programmes, it's about assessment. In the end it's about graduation certification and then it comes to the Alumni stage. So many students will not get to know the registrar unless they are, for example, academically excluded and need to appeal to the registrar and then I will step in and you know be like the...almost theof the student and see what we can do. So that's basically the traditional role; in addition to that the registrar is also the compliance officer of the university, so my responsibilities include policies, it's about academic regulations, it's about compliance in general, about reporting. So that's what I do and then in addition to that, you mentioned gender-based violence at the beginning, I have also occupational health practice that reports to me, our primary health clinic, and then also our office for HIV and AIDS; our institutional office for HIV and AIDS; so in that respect I'm also very much concerned about gender-based violence and you know just I think health issues in general, health and wellness of our students in general.
DR. MALKA	I mean listening to what you've said, it's almost as though the registrar's function provides the invisible infrastructure that people don't see but if it wasn't there they wouldn't be able to pursue their studies, they wouldn't have a programme, they wouldn't have all of the supporting structures in place that sees them go from registration to graduation.
PROF BURGER	Absolutely. Absolutely and you mentioned in my previous role as a Dean, you know, I was very much more involved in the day-to-day academic part of it, you know, being involved with say the offering of that academic programmes; now I'm responsible to make sure that the systems and

	<p>processes are in place. So it's quite a new sort of environment but it's...for me it was a very good preparation, being a Dean to then become a registrar because I understand that full life-cycle of a student and of course also for academic staff; what it involves, you know the teaching and the research part of it.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Yes, because you do a mix across stakeholders of both students as well as staff.</p>
PROF BURGER	<p>Absolutely.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>What would you say are perhaps your greatest challenges in the role?</p>
PROF BURGER	<p>My current challenges I would say is making sure that our systems and processes remain efficient and effective, you know, it's always about student friendly. It is about the use of new technology, it is about being really the forerunner when it comes to these enhancements of our systems. So for me that is a challenge but it's also the part that I enjoy most, it is to make sure that we stay abreast of all the new technology and new developments. I think the other thing that is becoming a problem for all universities is that how to fund our ambitions because we have a lot of high goals for amending, you know, and enhancing what we have currently and I see that's also part of your interest, the technology and the use of technology, but it comes with a price and of course that is where we need to make sure that we can streamline, but to still make it, you know, efficient and cost-effective.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Can you tell us a little bit about what some of those ambitions are at the university?</p>
PROF BURGER	<p>Well, we are going more and more online in terms of our programme offerings; blended learning for example, so it is to make sure that we can go online but we still provide the support that is required. The University of Johannesburg in particular is very much focused on providing what we say "access to global excellence" so we are for access but we also want to make sure that we can provide the very best there is. So it is then to balance, you know, for example the blended learning but to provide still that face-to-face contact. We don't want to become a distance education institution but at the same time we want to bring in technology and there's many ways of doing that and which we are currently using, you know, for example video material to enhance our teaching, so those are the things that, for us, is part of our ambitions.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>But that's such a challenge, I think, that the world over is having to experience, that we've got faster access to information, we've got access to more information and curricula are not having a chance to readjust to catch up with things; so how do you think we can develop capabilities for the future to overcome this gap?</p>
PROF BURGER	<p>Ja, no, it's a crucial, crucial question because you need to all the time reflect on what you offer for your students. I mean it is about their formal curriculum so it needs to be relevant, it needs to be dynamic, it needs to offer them whatever they need to become global citizens but as part of that it's also what do you teach outside the classroom, you know, the extra curricula activities that you offer, the opportunities for international exposure, you know, through art and culture, through sport; all those activities is...they are just as important as the formal classroom activities. So for us it is very important to reflect the whole time on what we offer to make sure that in the end it's not only about acquiring a certificate or a qualification, it is about what knowledge did they gain and how transferable will that knowledge be because they may have studied in one discipline and end up working in something else and for that they need the</p>

	skills to transfer, you know, and nowadays we speak more and more about not only about normal intelligence, it's about emotional intelligence, it's about ethical intelligence and those are the things that become more and more important to make sure that they are global citizens but really good citizens as well. So that's where the curriculum comes in and going forward it's becoming more and more inter-disciplinary, so it's flexible, it's inter-disciplinary, it's a longer menu that you can choose from not a fixed menu and then also it's also about different entry and exit levels. So it is for students that want to you know take a break, come back, how they come back, so you need to provide that articulation routes as well. So that is how the new student will be in the future, it will not be a student that comes in, sits just in this one form of programme, fixed from the start; it's a much more flexible building of a curriculum.
DR. MALKA	That is representative of what happens in life. So, universities moving with the times to be indicative of the way that the world works...
PROF BURGER	...absolutely....
DR. MALKA	...where things are not as prescriptive as...
PROF BURGER	...yes, ja...
DR. MALKA	...they may have been..
PROF BURGER	...and just, you know, when we were at university it was about getting the information from your books and textbooks, now, the information as you've pointed out, is out there, it is now to make sense of that and to make use of that. So it's not about providing the information, it is how to apply it and to, like I said, to transfer it to other fields as well.
DR. MALKA	And we've got such high mobility in terms of jobs, new opportunities, that those transferable skills are completely vital. One question that I wanted to ask you about the University of Johannesburg; you already said, which I think is a wonderful phrase "access to global excellence" but the institution has positioned itself as the future re-imagined; what role do you think and envision the institution will play to help realise South Africa's intention to produce more educated and not just knowledge educated but rounded citizens?
PROF BURGER	Yes, no, absolutely. Well, we are in a fortunate situation that we are actually the result of a merger between a traditional university and a technikon, you know, when the university was formed in 2005, it was from a technikon and the university so the result is that we offer a very wide spectrum of qualifications. We offer from higher certificates up to PhD's, so already in that aspect we can offer many entry exit levels, you know, and articulation possibilities. But then also in terms just of the diversity of our staff and of our students, I think we are truly a South African university and a university that is really with strong roots in Africa. So we strive for global excellence and we provide that opportunities for our students for internationalisation across, you know, right from undergraduate to postgraduate levels and we also have a diverse staff profile so we provide them with that opportunities also. So for us it is always to study within the context of this diverse community so that we can give them that knowledge that they need but also wider than just the classroom experience. But, at the same time I must say, with this 4 th Industrial Revolution that's now everyone is talking about, I think the university is very much running with that and is providing actually also leadership in terms of universities; our Vice Chancellor is an AI expert, that is his field, so for him.....
DR. MALKAhe's very passionate about 4IR....

PROF BURGER	...so he's for us the champion that we need to drive that and that he's actually inspiring all of us just to think 4IR the whole time, you know, and for us it's not just about the technology, it is about this you know the integration of the social sciences and the natural sciences, the engineering, the technology. So for us, we feel that is our niche area for that future re-imagined, that's where we will play our role.
DR. MALKA	Great, I think it's a wonderful stake in the ground and something to aspire towards and anchor student's ambitions as well as the institution.
PROF BURGER	Absolutely.
DR. MALKA	Turning towards you a little bit; you've spent much of your career in teaching, from high school mathematics to tertiary mathematics; you earned your PhD in maths and received several prizes as well as awards for academic achievement. When you were the Chairperson of the Department of Maths and Statistics at the University of Jo'burg you also initiated a wide range of outreach and academic support programmes, particularly in mathematics; firstly, what inspired you to study maths?
PROF BURGER	Well I think that's the importance of a teacher, a good teacher, because I had a very, very wonderful you know enthusiastic teacher in my early years. I was good in numbers, I loved playing with numbers you know, but when I had him as a teacher he made it so enjoyable and he also made sure that we experienced success because I think in mathematics it's...mathematics I always say it's a very simple subject in the sense that it's little steps every time, little building blocks, but the problem is if you miss some of those steps and then you're becoming fearful of that subject, then it is important to again just achieve small successes so that you can build confidence and for me, you know, that is what made the difference in my life, when I had that teacher I really started enjoying it and so for me it was a natural choice and then I saw what he did, I saw so many times with students that I had which, you know, when they arrived at the university they had to take mathematics as one of the subjects, say for engineering and so on, but they didn't like it because they were afraid of the subject, you know, afraid of the non-success that they will every time see and then it is for them to just a do a few calculations, show how easy it is and build confidence and thereafter they will be successful. So for me that was always the thing, just make sure that they start enjoying it, see that they can and you know then everyone actually can do it.
DR. MALKA	The right teacher is so important, I will always remember, I was given my range of subjects and biology teacher stood up and said "biology is the science of life" and I said wow, the science of life. Chemistry teacher stood up, "chemistry is the science of biology" and I was blown away again at this other development. Physics teacher stood up "physics is the science of the universe." As a result I ended up taking all three but it is about the passion that teachers inspire and how they contextualise where subjects fit into the world.
PROF BURGER	Absolutely, absolutely and with mathematics you know it is sort of a gatekeeper; it's the gateway to many of the subjects in the science, engineering, technology fields and it's becoming a gatekeeper in the sense that students will fail it and fail it and fail it, so therefore it was so necessary when I was in the maths department to make sure that we have these accesses; the bridging courses, the outreach and then to also actually we went beyond the boundaries of the university because our boundaries are the students basically but we said no, let's go and prepare our potential students....

DR. MALKA	...so going into the younger market....?
PROF BURGER	...so go and you know address these issues while these potential students are still young. So we had a couple of outreach programmes in the rural areas but in the end we also established a science centre at our Soweto campus where we then had in the end, now, it's not only mathematics, they have physics and chemistry, life sciences which is the bio-chem, IT skills and even English because the problem is with many schools, apart from the maths, they don't have laboratories so they never see science in action, they see it in the textbooks and so to provide them with that opportunity to come to laboratories, you know, on campus, we even have a mobile laboratory that we can take to schools in the rural areas and so for me that was an important way of addressing because if we wait until they come to university, in many instances they've already made the choice not to take mathematics but rather maths literacy, whereas they should actually take mathematics.
DR. MALKA	You've certainly got a passion for teaching and it's not just about what happens at the tertiary but it's about drawing in youngsters into the subject and I've seen that, that you really believe that a disadvantaged teaching background shouldn't be something as a block which prevents someone and excludes them from the world of science, engineering and technology and as you've said mathematics is the gate keeping subject to a world of new opportunities, particularly in the AI space, 4IR and all of those fields. These subjects have also been cited as not just purposeful jobs for the future, but also, jobs and environments where women should be making inroads because if they're not there, they're not going to be able to take advantage of these options. But yet, reports continuously indicate that women are underrepresented in the discipline which is obviously going to create a big gap for them in the new world; do you think the environment in South Africa is supportive enough to encourage female scientists?
PROF BURGER	I think it's changing. We're definitely not where we should be but I've seen changes, you know, in the time since I've been in academia and in my time as a Dean and even now where I sit I can see that there's lots of efforts to address it, for example the Department of Science and Technology will have special awards for females, there's special bursaries and there's overall encouragement in higher education for a better participation at all levels, not only at undergraduate, but at postgraduate level and we see it in the numbers, you know, we've moved for example close to 44% of our students in the Faculty of Science are now female students and they perform very well, I'm...when it comes to prizes in the university, you know the females are...the...in front, I must say. So I think once they get to university there's lots of support. For me it is more about how do we get them to that university, how do we to make sure that they consider studies in the sciences and engineering as possible studies and I think there universities need to work much more with the schools to have this career guidance, study guidance. I mean it was poor in my time, you know, we had a period we had to receive this guidance and it never happened, but....
DR. MALKA	...and it was always very traditional....
PROF BURGER	...yes, ja, so you will know about accounting, you will know about medical studies and so on, but you don't know about bio-chemistry, you mentioned bio-chemistry earlier. You may know about subjects that are taught at school but you don't know about geology; you may know about geography but so I think it's those exciting options; food technology, wire technologies, particularly now with 4IR you know the life sciences combined with technology. So I think that's where we need to do much more to tell them

	<p>about these exciting options and of course one can go to the internet, you can get all that info there but for me the worry is those that are in rural areas that don't have that access and that's where we reach out and as a university we go to those schools and we provide them with information and then you know to let them also come and experience, to see. Now the problem is of course sometimes they are very far from the university but now with virtual reality things we can also show them that so that they can actually get an experience of what a subject is about. But I think there's some improvement in this and like I said we see it in our numbers, we see it also in our staff numbers, just those that come through end up with a PhD in these fields, they of course start acting as role models, so it's a slow process but there's definitely, there's movement.</p>
DR. MALKA	Good, well I think 44% is a good figure to be at, 6% shy of 50....
PROF BURGER	Yes, we're almost there...
DR. MALKA	...it shows good progress...
PROF BURGER	...ja and that is in the science faculty; in the engineering faculty it's still in the 30's but there again there's special programmes for engineering students, you know, to make sure that we just reach out to them as well and there again the university, with its range of programmes, some of them may start off with a certain programme and articulate later on into another one. So yes, we're making progress, but we need to do more.
DR. MALKA	Well I think this is always a case where we've got the gaps, we know where those opportunity spaces are and to develop solutions to help close them off.
DR.MALKA	Today we're talking to Professor Kinta Burger who is the Registrar at the University of Johannesburg. We would love to receive your comments on Twitter:@WomaniyTalk.
	AD BREAK
DR. MALKA	Today we're talking to Professor Kinta Burger who is the Registrar at the University of Johannesburg. In the previous segment of the conversation we spoke about the work that she does as Registrar and the various responsibilities that the position entails. We also spoke about the importance of mathematics as being a key subject as a gateway subject towards science, engineering and technology streams and the significance of these subjects in terms of roles for the future.
DR.MALKA	Prof Burger, earlier in the conversation we spoke about the percentage changes in terms of women within the Faculty of Science and Engineering; what are your perspectives about women's empowerment and gender equality legislation, especially in terms of being able to close some of the gaps that women still experience whether it is about promotion, pay or positions?
PROF BURGER	Well I can only speak of my experience on higher education and I must say I think there, there's the right policies in place, there's the right programmes in place to provide that equality and you know just looking at our compositions and the rules that we apply to make sure that there is very equal representation from our council right through to our you know other committees, smaller committees, when it comes to promotions, etc., we don't have a special promotion criteria for female staff but we have programmes where we support them because we realise that in many instances just to complete your PhD is not easy and I think it's more difficult for our female staff in particular when they have small children. So we have programmes where we have research methodology where we have writing schools, writing in the sense of research writing and you know to give them lecture relief for example so that they can have more focused time on their PhD and from my understanding is you know other

	<p>universities are doing also similar interventions. So I think in higher education we are doing the right things, coming back to what I said earlier, because if we have them also as role models, then it just...the impact of all our efforts is so much stronger, so that we are doing. I must say also at the national level, if I look at what's happening say from the Department of Science and Technology, there is a focus on female academics and some progress has been made, more so at the more junior levels, I must say, right through the sector, at professor and associate professor level, that's where the gap still is and that is because you know it takes a few years to get to that level and sometimes our female colleagues will almost take a break from their research while they have their children and to get back into that, that's again where UJ's programmes are helpful, to give them then time and to say okay you're back now so now you're teaching load will maybe slightly lesser, just to find your feet again. So for me I think we are seeing the right things; just coming back to the national level I think there is policy in place, I know that from our government as well, they are striving to get more females in politics also, in the senior positions. So for me we are getting there but we are not there yet. For me the worry is more in terms of what happens maybe, you know, in the non-city environments, in the rural environments I'm not so sure the benefits always get to those females and in the sort of the more the city environment I think that is happening you know and also females becoming more assertive so when they get the confidence they will also stand up for themselves in terms of salaries and so on. How it happens, maybe outside the higher education, maybe more in the non-city environments, I'm not so sure that we are there where we should be.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>But at least it sounds like there's been great inroads in terms of the work that you're doing and have been exposed to within an area where you can control or contribute to...</p>
PROF BURGER	<p>...yes, ja...</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>...and hopefully there's spill over...</p>
PROF BURGER	<p>...absolutely, ja....</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>...into other spaces. One question I'd like to ask you is about your personal journey; some of our guests who've reached tremendous achievements in their respective disciplines have said that some of the factors that they consider to have contributed to their success, be it perseverance, hard work, fear of failure; there's a variety of things. In your opinion, what would you say have been some of the key drivers to your success?</p>
PROF BURGER	<p>I think it is about being hungry for success, you know, and then all those things that you mentioned, you know, resilience when it goes tough to still have that strive in you, perseverance you know, but for me also I think the support from others, very, very critical because it gets lonely, you will know when you study for your PhD sometimes you feel that you alone understand you know what you're going through, but then if there's support that helps tremendously. So for me it's also about females supporting each other that can help a lot, and of course family and friends, but for me one of the key drivers is, how can I put it? You call it the fear of failure; you will doubt yourself, you will go through these low points and then it is basically for you to up to you to put up your hand. When you are too scared to put up your hand, that is the time to do it, you know, because otherwise you will just blame yourself that why was this person appointed and I can do the work so much better afterwards and if that happens it means because you</p>

	didn't put up your hand. So, you must put up your hand, even in the..
DR. MALKA	...put up your hand to take advantage of opportunity or put up your hand about self-awareness that you need that extra bit?
PROF BURGER	I think put up your hand in terms of challenging yourself as well, you know, yes sometimes it is about opportunities but sometimes it is just I'm going to do this even if I'm too scared now. Say now with an interview, you know, when you need to have a public speech or something like that, that sometimes it's very challenging for people but if you just challenge yourself and say I'm going to put up my hand for this thing...
DR. MALKA	...step out of your comfort zone....
PROF BURGER	...yes and you know because you will learn from that and you're going to make mistakes and for me that is one of the key drivers and then something also, maybe when you work with people and to be successful working with people 'cause if you....like that emotional intelligence I spoke about, if you're not...you can be very, very...you can be a very strong person, academically strong, but you need to work with people and there for me very important is to know when you don't know and to let other people know that you know that you don't know; to acknowledge that. You know it's not failure on your part but it's almost like an outreach to build that relationship and to get advice from people, not only because of the advice but also because then people can also see that sometimes you need support and assistance and so on. So collaboration...collaboration in the broad sense; one of the key, key drivers you know, don't try and do it all on your own. So for me that's very important.
DR. MALKA	Those are all wonderful points and I always find it fascinating because everyone comes with a different set of ingredients and recipes that work for them so it's always refreshing to hear what some of those dynamics are with different people. Who would you say have been the strong women in your life?
PROF BURGER	Ohh I have so many, still. Well, there's so many...actually women that inspire me still, you know, because it's family members; it's a mix. I've got a mother who has always been very positive, even if it goes very, very, very...when she goes through very challenging times she will still find something positive you know and for me that's a very strong character. But then there's just nowadays I see female students that overcome challenges, you know, and then are successful and successful can just mean I'm passing this one against all odds. So for me there's many strong women but ja, there's been lecturers that I had, there's always examples in you know in sports of females that is standing out but I would not point out one, I think it's a bit of a mix. I don't have like you know one role model that I can say is the..is absolutely for me, the inspiration, it's a mix of those that I encounter and it's colleagues sometimes, you know, sometimes I would just stand amazed at how a difficult complex situation can be handled by one in such an elegant manner you know that I think wow, I wish I could do that and for me that is something that I try to learn then from my colleagues and from my sister and from so many others, you know, in my life.
DR. MALKA	Picking out different points of value that speak to you in the right moment in time. Now lastly, as we close out the conversation today, could you share a few words of wisdom or inspiration that you'd like to pass on to young ladies that are listening to us on the continent?
PROF BURGER	Well I think you know people will always the question also if you have the opportunity again to live your life, what will be different and so on, and there's many things that I've done wrong which I can think of which I would have done better but I think the overall choices that I've made, you

	<p>know, is the ones that I will probably make again and you will be...you will make choices when you are still very young and you may not be certain what to do but if you make those choices with the widest options available then it's still a good choice, you may not end up doing that. So for me, when I had to choose subjects I chose mathematics because it was for me one that could open doors and I will probably choose the same subject again, but in the end it is about making choices, then have a plan going forward, you know, the plan may not be perfect, it may change tomorrow but if you don't have some sort of direction, considering your options, working on that to make it work and have that plan then you all over it, so you may find that you now going in this direction, tomorrow in that direction but at least you're going into a direction. So for me that is a very important one, get to know yourself a little bit to know what at that stage what do you want to do and then work with a plan to get to that, you know, and then make use of all your support around you to get there.</p>
DR. MALKA	I think that is such a practical piece of advice of setting your path, your trajectory, not being limited by the choices you make today for the future and utilising the support structures that you have at your disposal.
PROF BURGER	Absolutely.
DR. MALKA	Thank you so much for joining us.
PROF BURGER	Thank you. Thank you to you. All the best with your programmes.
	PROGRAMME END