

PROGRAM DATE: 2019-08-15

PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: PROFESSOR SIBONGILE MUTHWA – VICE CHANCELLOR – NELSON MANDELA UNIVERSITY

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 on the line today from Port Elizabeth is Professor Sibongile Muthwa who is the Vice Chancellor of Nelson Mandela University. She holds a PhD from the School of Oriental and African Studies from the University of London; an MSC in Development Policy and Planning from the London School of Economics and Political Science; a BA and Honours from WITS and a BA in Social Work from Fort Hare University. Welcome to the show Prof!
PROF MUTHWA	Thanks for inviting us and thanks, I would like to also greet the listeners.
DR. MALKA	Thank you so much and one thing that I missed in the introduction which is incredibly important, especially given the dynamics of our show, is that not only were you appointed as the Nelson Mandela's University's first woman, but you're also the first African woman Vice Chancellor.
PROF MUTHWA	Yes I am.
DR. MALKA	So you currently lead the Nelson Mandela University, which is home to approximately 27,000 students who are potentially the future leaders of South Africa, as well as the continent whether that be in the public sector or the private sector and I read that on your appointment Prof Swartz said that "Dr. Muthwa will inspire new generations to rise to the highest levels of achievement; we are absolutely delighted with her appointment." Further to that, Nelson Mandela immortalised the words "education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world." The Nelson Mandela University is the only university in the world which carries Nelson Mandela's name; it's an honour as well as an enormous responsibility, so could you please start by telling us about your strategic plans for the university?
PROF MUTHWA	Thank you very much Amaleya, yes indeed, carrying Nelson Mandela's name is a daunting responsibility but it's also an honour so we are actually working hard to make sure that in the work that we do we are an academic and a scholarly expression of what our namesake stands for. Top in our agenda as a university is the transformation of the university, particularly the transformation of the curriculum content, as well the transformation on how we deliver the curriculum. Secondly I would say that our other priority and plan is to not only increase our research outputs but also we need to diversify the pool of researchers; we need to build aof the next generation of scholars from diverse backgrounds so we are investing a lot of resources in making sure that we build that pool to build for the future because as you would have heard that the academy in South Africa is faced with the situation of ageing academics so we feel that in order to build for the future we need to generate new scholars who are from diverse backgrounds. Thirdly I would like to emphasise the scholarship of engagement. We are not the only university that is concerned about engagement, as you know that a public university in South Africa has got

	<p>three missions which is the scholarship of teaching and learning, the scholarship of research and innovation as well as the scholarship of engagement. We have decided at the university that we are going to reframe engagement to make sure that we tap into other knowledges that do not actually also fit in in universities so that we are in touch with how we can conduct our scholarship in a manner that addresses the challenges that our country and our continent in particular face; issues around poverty, inequality and unemployment.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>When you speak about the engagement element, can you share a little bit more about what that's going to entail?</p>
PROF MUTHWA	<p>Yes, indeed. As I have said that all universities, all public universities have got a responsibility to drive and to deploy scholarship of engagement. What we mean by that is that our work has to respond and be responsive and take cognisance of the challenges that the society around us faces, but also we need to place our universities work in service to society. So we do not only go out and work with communities because we need to build them as receptacles of research and our owngeneration but also we would like to deliberately shorten the social distance between how the traditional university is understood and what is being required of us now in the 21st Century to put the work of the university in a position that it responds to the common challenges that are facing the most marginalised people. So that is our approach to engagement.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>The vision of the university states "to be a dynamic African university, recognised for its leadership in generating cutting-edge knowledge for a sustainable future" which obviously fits into part of the dynamics we spoke about on innovation and research.</p>
PROF MUTHWA	<p>Yes.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Tell us more about how the rest of the continent features in the university's vision.</p>
PROF MUTHWA	<p>It features very strongly. We have always had a number of partnerships; engagements with universities across our continents. Many of these, however, are based on a scientist to scientist relationship; we have got much fewer institution to institution partnerships, we are trying to grow these. It is very, very important for us that also we identify universities and countries that have got a synergy, an alignment in their work to what we want to do so we have a partnership for example with the University of Makerere, we have got a partnership with Malawi University of Science and Technology. We have a relationship with a number of universities in East Africa, but going forward following our name, what we have committed for ourselves is to be deliberately African in our stance in the manner that we...in the way we conduct our science so that we have a keen understanding and appreciation of societal problems that fails our continent. One of the project ventures, if I can call it that, that we want to embark on is to trace the footsteps of Nelson Mandela. You'll remember that just before Mr. Mandela was arrested back in the 60's, he visited a few countries to get support for the work that he was doing at the time to fight for liberation. So having committed then as a university that we need to be a scholarly and an intellectual expression of social justice and human rights, so we need to go back. Of course we'll continue to partner with the countries that we are already partnering with and universities that we are already partnering with but also we would like to go back to the footsteps of Nelson Mandela as an expression of our work using the best that the university can use which is the scholarly expression of that brand.</p>

DR. MALKA	That sounds like a great legacy development that you're going to be initiating and it also seems to tie into the point that you made earlier on looking at how the university is adjusting and updating its curriculum content as well as its delivery of the content for the transformation.
PROF MUTHWA	Yes indeed, we would like also to speak of a curriculum that is inclusive, that the multiplicity of experiences that our academics, our publics, our students, they bring to the learning experience that encounter in the classroom, in the research laboratory, should also take on board who is our student; where do they come from, what are their aspirations and part of that is our appreciation of what it means to be African because it is in that manner where we can meet the rest of the world from a standing position.
DR. MALKA	And what would you say it means to be African?
PROF MUTHWA	To be African means...I think it's the most basic understanding of our history, of our struggles. The archive of Africa remains largely hidden because as you know that the university as a construct has been positioned in the public files as a Western construct but some of the oldest universities were in Africa and we need to really show this when we teach our students, we need tothis that actually some of the best universities were in North Africa, some of the best mathematicians were from Egypt, contrary to the understanding that our students, especially South Africa since we were colonised for so long, that our students sometimes do not fully understand that we have to work to affirm our own institutions as the cradle of knowledge as well. So for me our appreciation, our consciousness that South Africa is not a country out of Africa, South Africa is Africa and I think this is what the students also in that period of "Fees Must Fall" when they were talking about decolonisation and transformation of the curriculum, they were actually saying what is it of us that is in this curriculum that you are teaching us. So for me to be African is to have that deeper consciousness of what we stand for as African people in the space of knowledge creation.
DR. MALKA	So in part it's about asserting our identity, it's about making sure that our research outputs as a country, as a continent are shared and distributed and that we put our stamp on the academic map.
PROF MUTHWA	We need to put our stamp on the academic map. Africans and African institutions are highly studied and researched by the West and while that...because knowledge is freedom, so while that happens we need to prioritise telling our own stories, we need to prioritise making sure that the graduate attributes of our students when they leave university, they actually understand that wherever they settle in the world, they are working and their identity should not forget where they come from and that is how I think the strong nations are really predicated on sufficient self-understanding and self-awareness and self-knowledge.
DR. MALKA	You mentioned briefly "Fees Must Fall" and obviously that was a significant student-led movement in South Africa where people were protesting against university...escalating university fees; we saw the first wave in 2015 and again in 2016....
PROF MUTHWA	...yes.....
DR. MALKA	...young people are known the world over for being catalysts of change, but, I understand that during this period Student Affairs formed part of your portfolio, so can you share with us how the dynamics of this movement steered change?
PROF MUTHWA	What "Fees Must Fall" did was to cause us as society, but particularly as a sector, to stand up and to appreciate that things have not been going as well as they should have been going. While the centre piece of the struggle was

	<p>for access and for fees to fall, more...but it was more than that, students not only wanted the fees to fall, but also they wanted the symbols of oppression that they felt that still existed in universities to be challenged and to be displaced and to be removed, so that was part of what the students called for. Students were also calling for the re-imagination and the reframing of the government systems of universities which they felt that they are not always included or they are included as an afterthought. So the whole governance of universities, the old leadership of universities and the extent to which they centre the students was an important call that the students made. Also the students were calling for the transformation, the so-called decolonisation of the curriculum and then Student Affairs indeed was part of my portfolio at that time but not only that, for 8 months of the year 2016, which was the epitome at the crescendo of the Fees Must Fall, I was acting as Vice Chancellor of the University at that time for 8 months so I was quite involved in that process and I've noticed that there have been a lot of writings that have come out about Fees Must Fall and what happened at that time and only some of the stories have been told. Universities, especially previously white universities, it was for the first time to have a mobilisation of this kind, but for me, notwithstanding that some of the aspects of that time were quite rough and quite traumatic for some members of staff and students, but what it did is to actually help the universities to actually look very carefully at what have we done and what is our ambition and our appetite for putting the student at the centre of our work. So for me I think that the Fees campaign was a just campaign but I think we can learn more and I think we have learned more about how we should run universities from that period of time. So we should not lose those lessons.</p>
DR. MALKA	That was quite an introduction to you becoming the VC on a permanent basis; one would almost say it's baptism by fire.
PROF MUTHWA	It was....it was....it was very robust and very....it was a very active time; very uncertain time and what was required at that time, what was required from us as the leadership, particularly from myself, is to steady the university, to steady the academics, to steady the students and join the hope in the circumstances that we found ourselves in and I think those stories are yet to be told and there is a particular issue also if you are a woman leading in that environment, so for me it was a huge lesson, I got to know more about myself than I did before Fees Must Fall and I'm grateful that our university at least has decided not to waste the lessons that came out of that crises.
DR. MALKA	And that's all one could hope for, that those lessons are invested. This moves me onto our next topic of female leadership where you've really had to step up to the mark of demonstrating all of those leadership capabilities to steady the ship; calm the storm and move ahead.
PROF MUTHWA	Yes.
DR. MALKA	But when we look across our academic leadership, well there are very few women occupying the VC posts....
PROF MUTHWA	...yes....
DR. MALKA	...I mean the few that come to mind is obviously yourself, Prof Mamokgethi Phakeng – UCT; Prof Xoliswa Mtose from University of Zululand; in your opinion what needs to happen to ensure that we manage to get more women up and making it to the top?

<p>PROF MUTHWA</p>	<p>Ja, thank you very much. You know it saddens me the fact that we get lifted up because we are only four women, in fact Professor Thoko Mayekiso is at University of Mpumlanga, so as I speak there are four women Vice Chancellors in this sector and clearly one would have loved to be known for having done a good job as a leader of a university, not to be known first and foremost as being the first woman and the first African woman and one of only the four Vice Chancellors, so it is a recognition that is coming from a place which I wish we were not in. So for us it is going to be important that we start from the beginning because I mean girls need to know as they grow up that they've got as much right and capacity and promise to do as well as men can but we actually have not been able to do that. I don't just think it's a South African problem, I mean in our continent there are very few women vice chancellors and in the world, there are much fewer vice chancellors so we need to have targeted education at schools as well as at the university when we grow our own timber of our academics we need to have special programmes that support women that are promising to be strong academics but also just talking about that also my own path to academia was not a straight path, from...coming from being a junior academic and I did not work my way in the system, I actually have been half of my life working in a university and half of my life working in public life, in the public service. So we must re-think the leadership of universities because it is important also at the leadership of...at the levels in which we lead for young people who want to take over; young women who want to take over these positions of vice chancellors and deputy vice chancellors that it is important to know how the academic project works but also for me more importantly to have the full appreciation of the human condition and the role then of scholarship in addressing that human condition. So for me people that...women that come to lead universities, they need to project the worldly perspective as well as have the scholarly depth and I think that they need to have targeted intervention for women scholars, for women leaders so that we put them at par or perhaps they work to believe that they can just lead because there's actually nothing that is stopping a woman to lead well and to lead even better than men, so I think young women scholars need to understand that and then we need to have targeted programmes to support them.</p>
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>And that formalisation of programmes that helps you to develop a pipeline, it helps you to look at where the talent is, it helps you to nominate the right individuals; to nurture them so that you've got succession planning.</p>
<p>PROF MUTHWA</p>	<p>Yes, definitely. We are actually at our university we are starting the leadership...the teaching and learning and leadership academy and within that we want to target women scholars so that..and women leaders, even if they are not academics because the issue of leadership at the top level of universities is actually right across the university sector. So as you go up the pipeline you find that the top leadership of universities, as well as the top professors, they are dominated by males and so for us it means that we have to identify promising women and even identify women that have got potential but who do not believe that leadership of universities is their forte and then we need to deal with those assumptions, we need to provide training opportunities, we need also to make sure that they have got proximity to power and influence because what actually tends to push a woman up is that proximity, that opportunity to watch leadership and to participate at close range and I find that if no-one creates those spaces and makes sure that there's that proximity for young scholars to grow to the positions in which we occupy and to re-balance the touch and feel of how the university leadership looks like, it is not going to happen, so we need to</p>

	intervene directly.
DR. MALKA	It's almost like having a junior board where they're not at risk of making the wrong decisions but they get the exposure and the indirect experience of what takes place so that when they are ready they can ascend the ladder.
PROF MUTHWA	Definitely, definitely, indeed and also what we are thinking about as well in that regard is what we call the post service institute where we try to retain the scholars, the leadership of university that are progressive, that are like mentors, who can...where we can attach young people, but young women in particular, who are wanting to work at universities so that they have got direct support in growing to be leaders of universities and this will not happen just...it won't trickle down to them, we need to identify them. I like your idea of a junior board but actually they need to have proximity to a person like myself, to a senior DVC, to a senior executive director to actually know how the dynamics of power and authority work and how to deal with the issues of self-doubt, the issues of feeling of being less, even though all the evidence points to the contrary that you are talented but the social...I think ecosystem in which we have grown up and we have been socialised does not always indicate to women that they can scale the heights of top achievement.
DR. MALKA	And you know all of those elements that you mentioned, they're not written in any text book, that's the stuff that you get out of the osmotic connections with people who have walked that journey. Now I'd like to ask you a bit more about your personal journey; you already mentioned that, you know, you haven't followed a traditional trajectory of rising up through the ranks of university; of being both in the academic sector as well as outside it. One of the questions that I'd like to ask you is about the factors that you consider have contributed to your success?
PROF MUTHWA	Thank you. Where do I start? I come from a background, a community, I...perhaps it's easier to say home, but I come from a community which was not privileged but believed in the importance of education as a game changer, so I've always known and I've always seen evidence that education is a game changer and at heart I believe in service before self; that was instilled in me as a young person. So if you look at my career it has been a career...of course I'm a leader of a university at this point in time but I come from a perspective of service so I grew up from a home where...I was brought up mainly by my grandparents, by my grandfather in particular, who believed that there is no job for a man or for a woman, that....
DR. MALKA	...that's pretty unusual for the time....
PROF MUTHWA	...yes, yes it is pretty unusual for the time. My grandfather never went to a formal school, he schooled himself and he was a social entrepreneur of his time and then he believed that I could be...I was a promising child and I could be anything that I wanted to be. So I've always, notwithstanding the traditional home that I came from, I've always believed that I can do anything that I set my mind on. But having said that though, no-one can achieve anything alone. I mean I come from a closely knit community which supported a child that has got promise and I've been very fortunate to have mentors in my life, to have people who saw talent in me which I didn't see and part of the work that I've promised and I've committed my life to do is to identify and support young people with promise, particularly young women with promise, so that they have self-belief so that they do not have to wait for many years that some of us have waited before we do the jobs that we do, so that they've got an early leap to opportunity. So I spend a lot of my time dedicating my time to that because that is where I come

	from.
DR. MALKA	Well I don't think your role could be better placed in terms of being able to nurture young people and groom them for the future.
PROF MUTHWA	Definitely, yes and also just to be a role model, you know, I'm quite aware of it's a burden but it's also a privilege to actually know that there are so many young people that when they look at me they become hopeful, that it's all going to be fine because if she can do it I can also do it. So I mean for me it's not just about how well do I do that job but also how well do I keep that promise, keep that possibility alive when a young person looks at me and how I carry my work, I carry myself.
DR. MALKA	And that provides the inspiration. You mentioned that your grandparents looked after you as you were growing up; could you share a couple of pivotal moments in your life that made you to be the person you are today?
PROF MUTHWA	Yes, thank you very much. I...actually what is not known much publicly is that I went to a Catholic boarding school, a girls only school. My grandparents was one of those first persons that became Christians and then in the part of the country where I come from the Catholic church was very strong so I actually went to a Catholic boarding school and then all that you do in boarding school which is sport and reading and for me I had a lot of time to think about my career because you do two things, you do sport and then you do reading, so I read about...I worked in the library as a student in my boarding school so I spent all the time surrounded by books and I decided to learn about persons, I remember as a young person seeing the picture of Winnie Mandela, for example, I mean she was a social worker and then I said that perhaps that is what I want to do, to serve humanity and that is the first profession that I took. So for me it was pivotal that I had an opportunity to leave the village as a young person and be in the boarding school and to read about the world, to think about my identity, to hone my identity so that I had a lot of time to think about the choices that I needed to make. So for me that was important but also and I still mention it a few times when I'm asked, when I was younger I was taught that it is important to always create a moment of reflection, a moment of contemplation by yourself. So I still to this day, that was the biggest lesson I learned from my grandfather; that you have to wake up when the world is still still and think about yourself, about the world, about your contribution. So for me up to now the quietest times of reflection are the times when opportunities are used to think about the new directions in which I can lead the university, in which I can contribute to the leadership of society in the space that I am in. So for me the lesson to face up to yourself and to be in touch with who you are is the hallmark of sound leadership and is something that I learned at the foot of my grandfather as a young girl that many years ago.
DR. MALKA	That's a strong message of authenticity and also an incredible journey going from village to VC.
PROF MUTHWA	Yes, thank you, it is, it is. It's been...ja it's been remarkable and I'm grateful for all the support that I've been given by my family, by my community, by my colleagues. I've got a strong ecosystem of support, of persons that have always believed in myself more than I did.
DR. MALKA	And lastly, as we close out our conversation today, could you please share a few words of inspiration or wisdom that you'd like to pass on to young ladies in the continent that are listening to the show?
PROF MUTHWA	Yes. My understanding, from the bottom of my heart, is that a woman can be anywhere they choose to be. I mean we need to be alive to opportunities, of support and then we need to have courage to grab opportunities that we

	<p>get and but also I really believe that it is...we need to understand also that it is fine to be vulnerable. It is fine to be doubtful. It is fine to have fear and then the extent to which you are in touch with that fear, with that self-doubt and then you turn it into strength is actually something that women still have to rise up to and I always also say to young people, to young women in particular that I believe that we lead not only in a strategic and a tactical manner but we bring compassion into the leadership positions that we have. So I've said to my students you must continue to hold common values because everyone wishes for what you have already, so there's always someone who is in a worse position than you are and I find that a well-rounded leader who inspires hope is the leader that is able to take forward the aspirations of the next generation. So that would be my advice to young women.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Thank you so much for joining us and really your insight into leadership attributes of not just about the technical components and getting the job done but also the holistic view that you bring through is very refreshing on the soft skills and the motivation to inspire. Thank you so much for joining us.</p>
PROF MUTHWA	<p>Thank you; thanks for having me, thank you. Bye-bye.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>PROGRAMME END</p>