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PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: MP MARIE SUKERS – AFRICAN CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY (ACDP)

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 is Ms Marie Sukers from the African Christian Democratic Party (the ACDP) who serves as a Member of Parliament and sits on several portfolio committees. She joins us in our series covering perspectives from women across different political parties in South Africa. Welcome to the show!
MP MARIE SUKERS	I must say thank you, thank you for inviting me on, I'm really excited to have this discussion with you Dr. Malka and thank you to your listeners
DR. MALKA	It's a pleasure to have you on board and also to learn more about the ACDP in particular reference to women and its various policies. So, to start with, we've got several different political parties which are represented in our National Assembly and contribute to the country's multi-party democracy. You're a member of several portfolio committees, specifically Basic Education as well as Social Development and you're also an alternate member of the Portfolio Committee of Health. To begin with, could you tell us a bit more about the responsibilities that come with being an MP?
MP MARIE SUKERS	I think one of the biggest responsibilities and I reflected a lot on it this week as part of the...when I was part of the delegation that went to Uganda; the greatest responsibility we have is to serve South Africa and that is across the board, regardless of which parties they are from. So, as a member of parliament I believe my biggest responsibility is towards the people of South Africa and to serve them. Secondly, to hold to account, specifically in portfolio committees that is one of the biggest roles that we play as committee members is to hold the executives to account and so within committees the oversight role of parliament, you know, is displayed. One of the responsibilities as well of members of parliament, it is the most exciting for me is the going back to our communities and ensuring that the legislation that has been passed in the last couple years, that it is actually working and that departments are functional within communities and also to hear what are the issues that our communities are grappling with in terms of service delivery; that for me as a member of parliament is two of the key things, the one being to serve our people and the second to be visible on the ground to ensure that whatever has been happening in parliament is actually, you know, translated into the lives of ordinary South Africans and also at the same time, to ensure that the voice of people on the ground and the issues that they are grappling with are being heard in parliament and within our different committees.
DR. MALKA	So, we've got two core components there, one; the innate view of being able to serve the public, but importantly, in terms of serving the public, that the public actually receives tangible deliverables.
MP MARIE SUKERS	Absolutely.

DR. MALKA	Within the portfolio committees that you serve in, what would you say are some of the key targets as priorities that are going to be implemented?
MP MARIE SUKERS	I'm part of, as you said before, I'm sitting on Social Development and as most people know more than almost half of our population are dependent on social grants and one of the key things that the Committee has, that is uniform, it's united about, is the issue of service delivery, the insurance of our people being served on time and in time and having access to the different products or the different services that they can have to alleviate poverty, that's...in terms of social development it's one of the key things for us and the other key thing in social development now is to get the backlogs that is currently on the foster care grants being experienced in all of the provinces, to get that, you know, off and get foster care grants to be processed before the 30 th November, for that to be done and dusted and all provinces have made commitments to the Committee that they will do that because obviously that impacts directly on the most the vulnerable people that are dependent on the foster care grants, as well as people that you know are having foster children in their care. Those are the two key things I think in the next quarter that is very important for people to be aware of and that we are pushing in the Committee.
DR. MALKA	And from a basic education perspective?
MP MARIE SUKERS	So safety in our schools and together with the Comprehensive Sexual Education that has had such a huge, for us, our constituency particularly, Comprehensive Sexual Education for us, we have addressed within the Committee and we have addressed with the Department as well. So that is more from a curriculum change for sexes because Life Orientation is being you know is being changed in terms of sexual education by the Department and they're introducing comprehensive sexual education as of 2020; it's one big issue for the ACDP; what that means, what it entails, you know whether the stakeholders have been consulted widely enough and where the parent's rights are being honoured by the Department and that we're not just adopting a UN, you know, a UN programme willy-nilly onto South Africa, which the Department has said they are not, but we are waiting for them to show us that and also it's not just ACDP, it is across parties, there's also been a call from the Portfolio Committee that the Department needs to go to communities and stakeholder schools to get...to consult further because that is one of the concerns that the Committee has highlighted. In terms of basic education let me just go to the safety aspect of schools and as well as within the context of gender-based violence; that is one key issue that has been highlighted within the Committee is the infrastructure within our schools to serve our learners and to keep our learners safe as well as the relationship between the police; the linking of services between Social Development, the police and the Basic Education Department, it's critical for us to ensure the safety of our children; that's number one and second to ensure that we are holistically addressing the issues that are stopping kids from completing their studies and that can be...that's a myriad of things. It's things such as, you know, the social breakdown of families where people need...children need services and support and that's why that integration of services are so critical for us within the Committee to ensure that departments are actually linking and speaking to one another so that we address the things that affects our learners.
DR. MALKA	And in consideration of the two portfolio committees that you serve on, Social Development and Basic Education as principal portfolios, they really go towards addressing our triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality.

MP MARIE SUKERS	Yes.
DR. MALKA	One of the other portfolios in a...perhaps a slightly different context is the Multi-Party Women's Caucus; could you tell us what the role is of the Multi-Party Women's Caucus in terms of progressing women's agendas in South Africa? For instance, you mentioned from a school's point of view, that gender-based violence is one of the concerns...safety issues that is being addressed.
MP MARIE SUKERS	The Multi-Party Women's Caucus plays a vital role in unifying women around the issues that our country faces, particularly when it comes to gender-based violence, you know, it's a unifying platform. It serves as a place where women can also, as women, address the issues that face us as women. So firstly, as looking at our nation and unifying around the core issues, because I believe women are vital to that, I believe that if you bring women together in one room you would actually get a solution very fast and within the Women's Caucus it provides you that platform, you know, to address the scourges that we're currently facing, that's one, and secondly it provides also for us the opportunity to really advance the empowerment and the empowerment of women within the legislature as well as outside, externally, looking at women's issues and how to advance things such as issues such as education, you know, such as the development of women in terms of the economy, it provides that platform and it also provides support, you know, for parliamentary...for women within the legislature to form relationships and to become supportive of one another as we face the challenges because political life is not a smooth ride; it is quite a challenging environment to find yourself in as a woman.
DR. MALKA	Yes, and having fourteen different parties represented; it must be very diverse and there must be a lot of engagement and different passions and opinions flying in the rooms.
MP MARIE SUKERS	You know what I've found, which is what I drive, it's part of my values as a person as well as my view of the next five years for South Africa; what I've found is that you know people relate to each other differently one-on-one than when we are within a parliament setting because there it's you know it's part of them. What I've found in the engagements within parliament is that yes it is very diverse, it is very different though, it is rich, it is challenging but there is a camaraderie that comes with being a woman and that's why I think women are vital to try and bring solutions because there is a willingness of engagement that you don't necessarily find when you're in a parliament sit down. Within the Women's...within the Women's Caucus there is more of a willingness of engagement; an openness to engage.
DR. MALKA	That's a very positive comment to hear.
MP MARIE SUKERS	Yes.
DR. MALKA	Turning towards your party for a moment; according to the African Christian Democratic Party's website, the party stands for Christian Democratic Principles and aims to bring South Africa hope for a strong, healthy, prosperous and purpose-driven nation. Could you tell us a little bit about some of your policies in relation to women?
MP MARIE SUKERS	I think one of the things, Dr. Malka, that I need to highlight for the ACDP is that we believe strong and healthy women...strong, healthy, empowered women is at the centre of healthy communities. It's really at the centre of it and in everything we do we seek to recognise and respect and enhance women and recognise the contribution, the huge contribution that women make to promote strong and stable families and we believe that anything that, you know, is a threat to women is a threat to society and I don't know

	if you've had the opportunity to look at the speech that I did in parliament, for me there was a very poignant moment. I diverted from my speech and I walked...I presented just a spontaneous speech really and walked off. But as I walked off, maybe people couldn't see that, I was met by the men in my party standing up. It was a very emotional day. I mean that whole week we had, you know, the murder of Uyinene, Jesse Hess; just women that was just, you know, murders that just rocked South Africa....
DR. MALKA	...yes....
MP MARIE SUKERS	...and for me to walk off that stage and see men like Wayne Thring, our Deputy President, our President Dr. Kenneth Meshoe standing at the end of the line to just, you know, embrace me, was for me such a poignant moment because men are central to advance number one women, secondly to ensure that women are being promoted. It is the men in our lives and within the ACDP that's the environment that we have as a culture, you know, there is a respectfulness towards women and in everything that we do and you know we serve four members in parliament at the moment and I always say to people I work in the most amazing environment and that is central to the ACDP because of the Christian values, the recognition of women; recognising the role that women play in building strong societies, it's underpinned in every policy that we have.
DR. MALKA	Some parties have mandates in place where they've got quotas according to the composition of women in different structures, whether it's management, executive level; do you find that you utilise a quota system's too?
MP MARIE SUKERS	We don't...how can I put it...I think we don't push a quota system within the ACDP, but we promote women within the ACDP. So we don't have a particular number that we press for, but let me tell you for instance in the Western Cape, I was number twenty on the list, I was promoted by men in the party. I was being, you know, they felt on merit that I should be the person that goes to parliament as an example and throughout our executives we have women representation on our National Executive Committee as well as within our PECs. So not a quota system that we follow, but we do follow an approach of respect, mutual respect, for any gender; that's number one and but secondly, there is a definite focus on promoting women, which in this case was me is, it's very clear.
DR. MALKA	And given the promotion aspect of women in the party, how would you say that that's transformed the gender composition?
MP MARIE SUKERS	I would say, if you just talk about us as a party, like I said, there is a strong focus on promoting women just because of where we're at as a country and the history that we come from in terms of women but, you know, we still have a long way to go in terms of promoting and capacitating women to fulfil the roles when they do come into senior positions within party or within parliament, to provide them with the tools and with the support that they need in order for them to fulfil that. So, it's not just about driving the numbers, it's also about ensuring that when women are chosen that they're able to fulfil that and do it excellently so because if we don't do that then we actually undermine the agenda of empowering women to deliver, you know....
DR. MALKA	...of course....
MP MARIE SUKERS	...so yes, yes...
DR. MALKA	One of the things...you spoke briefly when we started on the topic concerning women in the party and we spoke briefly about the horrendous...let's say gender-based violence news that has really been highlighted from femicide, rape, to various protests of Shut Down Sandton, Am I Next, the scenes outside parliament

	<p>which were incredibly powerful and really strong, important awareness campaigns, which ultimately should lead to action. Can you tell us a bit about the speech that you made?</p>
<p>MP MARIE SUKERS</p>	<p>The speech really came from a place of it was as if there is a disconnect between what happens within the halls of parliament and what is happening in the street and it is because, I think, because, you know, we function in this bubble where you know it's business as usual almost. The programme is set and we need to go for it, but that day specifically was actually a debate on women, that was actually the debate and around me, as I was preparing to go up, it was amazing to me that you had woman after woman speaking and yet it was as if there was no recognition of the voices of women and for me it was very profound because I think that is what women experience in our communities or when they enter police stations is that almost as if you're not heard, you know, and for me when I was standing up there and going up to speak, it was that, it was the noise level and women were speaking from the heart and they were speaking out of, you know, what is happening in the country and I just spontaneously you know spoke off that. For me I felt as a nation we need to pause. I felt we needed a pause, we need really a pause, after eight years of you know corruption and our very pillars of our...that upholds this democracy being, you know, destroyed in terms of the number of money that goes out; that's number one, then secondly having the month that was...it was like a full-on war that was being highlighted. I think we were in a...in South Africa it was so easy to forget that actually there was violence being perpetrated against women every single day, every single second and just because it was not so in your face, it wasn't as blatant, as horrendous as that week; it's almost that week for me was the shifting point for us to recognise that we're in crises here and we need to pause, we need to pause and we need to give voice to the pain that is in our society and we need to address it, you know, every single layer of society but it needs to be driven from the court house and it needs to be driven from parliament and it must be driven from the presidency. So that was really the nature of my speech.</p>
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>And coming out of the events, I know there was an extraordinary joint sitting of parliament which raised a five-point plan of prevention, strengthening the criminal justice system, enhancing legal and policy framework, ensuring adequate care, support and healing for victims of violence and strengthening the economic power of women and you know one of the things that you mentioned at the beginning of the conversation was about the ability to serve the South African populace and importantly, being able to go back to communities and see things in action. So, with this five-point plan, do you think that we will start to be seeing more tangible effects taking place with action happening?</p>
<p>MP MARIE SUKERS</p>	<p>You know my...Dr. Malka when I listen to a speech, I always ask myself how does the man in the street, what does it mean for him or for the woman in the street; what does that mean. So, when I hear what the president said it was a relief, I think, for many people because it was a relief because it's been addressed, but for me there is a multi-layered approach that needs to take place. That it is at a societal level that we need to link the different services that are available to people. So, it is very good for the president to put the finger or the, you know, to address the wound, but the treatment of that wound needs to be within our communities. It is...from the moment when somebody is subjected to any kind of violence and should seek intervention, whether it be how fast an ambulance comes or how fast you know there is a response from a community to assist her ,to help her to get to a police station, that five-points that the president has spoken about, it needs to be translated on the ground. It is the policeman that services the person at the police station that needs to be empowered and trained to deal with women as they</p>

	<p>come in and they are victimised. So, for me I'd say within parliament it needs to become a reality on the ground and as South Africans, we need to make sure of that and that is across all societies, that is why in my constituency I have set out a programme and I am meeting with every single faith-based organisation. I am going to schools I am ensuring that I've put an action plan together because we need to make sure that whatever was communicated there is actually going to happen on the ground. That for me is the crux of the matter, is that you can have a whole policy document, we see it in South Africa, we've got policies upon policies, great policies, it doesn't meet the man on the street if there's no vehicle that translates and brings those services to them, for me that is the crux</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Yes and that is the implementation, that is where we'll see the action and that's where we'll start to see the change.</p>
MP MARIE SUKERS	<p>Yes, yes, absolutely.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>You are listening to 'Womanity – Women in Unity' on Channel Africa, the African Perspective, on frequency 9265 KHz on the 31 Meter band, also available on DSTV, Channel 802. Today we're talking to Member of Parliament Ms Marie Sukers from the African Christian Democratic Party. We would love to receive your comments on Twitter@WomanityTalk.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Ms Sukers, staying with the parliamentary theme, I know that you spent some time in Uganda recently for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, which I believe was addressed under a theme Adaptation, engagement and evolution of Parliaments in a rapidly changing commonwealth; could you please share with us some of the insights that perhaps really relate to women that came out of that conference?</p>
MP MARIE SUKERS	<p>Yes, the first part of the conference was the CWT which is the Commonwealth Women's Parliament and we chose the chairperson, there's the...from Pakistan and...but what was really invigorating about it, I was invigorated, I could fly, is that it had a look back over thirty years of achievements and what is unfinished in terms of advancing women, in advancing the women agenda, specifically looking at gender equality and one of the key highlights out of it was that, you know, we have such a progressive push for women advancement, yet, there was only 24% of women representatives across the Commonwealth hey, 24%, and....</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>...gosh, that's less than a quarter...</p>
MP MARIE SUKERS	<p>...yes and we make half of the world's population, so we have a long way to go and part of the CWP's focus over the two days was looking at how do we advance and empower women within legislature, you know, to make them successful and they looked at mentoring and mentoring programmes for parliamentarians; that's number one and secondly, really focusing on building capacity. So, in terms of training of women and continuous studying of women to make them effective so that we push the numbers, yes, to get women in parliament but secondly, making sure that they are effective in what they do as women in senior positions and then pushing for that to happen, you know, promoting the agenda for women to take up senior positions within parliament. It was really rich discussions; it was really awesome. I met awesome women across the African continent, ja.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Having that opportunity with meeting women from different sectors of the Commonwealth and looking at how we can address unfinished issues....</p>
MP MARIE SUKERS	<p>...yes....</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>...which countries would you say are getting it right?</p>

MP MARIE SUKERS	I wish I had my notes in front of me because there are countries that really gets it right. For instance now in our own country, as you know, we've got our own speaker of the House of Parliament who is a woman and we have the National Council of Provinces Chair, she's a woman and within Ghana I think they had the highest percentage and I'm under correction here but South Africa is certainly doing very well in terms of our...we're not where we are supposed to be but we are really among the top countries in terms of pushing women....
DR. MALKA	...ja, I think we're in the top ten, if I remember reading correctly....
MP MARIE SUKERS	...yes, yes, that's right, we are among the top countries to push, that is very interesting as well to me to see what is happening in places like Pakistan and India; that there is a strong push for women and powerful women. Really powerful women. I was listening to a lecture by one of the ladies from Pakistan that really addressed the issue about being strategic, you know, in your role as a woman parliamentarian and it served us...it served me very well to be in that forum. There is still a long way to go for us to get women into senior positions, but we're certainly further than when we started.
DR. MALKA	Besides looking at mentor programmes and developing and building capacity, what else do you think we need to help women advance and start closing the gaps, whether it's from a political empowerment, economic participation, etc?
MP MARIE SUKERS	I think first of all we need to make it easier for women to enter, you know, to participate in the economy and I'm now looking at this disparity that exists within our communities. I work within my constituents and I'm bringing it down to ground level here; if I look at the number of women who goes to study further after they've completed their matric, it's not a high number and we need to do better with that. For me the key to us empowering women is the access to education and we need to level the ground for young girls to enter into tertiary education because without tertiary education and I look at myself, but let me complete the thought to say without tertiary education it's very difficult to drive the women agenda because you need to get women to be able to participate. So, from an educational perspective we need to level the ground and I think us women that have gone before and that have the opportunity, we need to really band together to make it happen. We need to support those organisations that you know that has that as an agenda, we need to contribute, we need to participate, we need to get more women like yourself to come into our communities to speak to our young women so that they see what is possible, they need to see the possibilities and secondly, economically, we really need to make it easier for women to access grants and funds that will assist them to participate in the economy and own their own businesses and it shouldn't be so difficult but it is in South Africa, it's extremely difficult for women to advance themselves economically.
DR. MALKA	Well we're also having to contend with other issues, so, besides trying to you know win and become a bread maker we've also got aspects of culture, religion, tradition, which form into this mix of tensions which doesn't add to making life easier.
MP MARIE SUKERS	Ja, you know I think in my experience, I think women are really in a better place now in terms of the mindsets that exists. There is a greater openness and even celebration, you know, of the achievements of women and I think that we have done well in the South African context to really celebrate the women that has achieved, you know, and has done well. At the level where there is disparity it's poverty that entrenches, you know, the gender role, you know, that see's them as lesser. It's where we find ourselves vulnerable, that's why domestic violence and you know violence against women are perpetrated...in an environment of poverty it is accelerated, you know,

	because there is an excursion of dominance that is based on vulnerability, so I think, yes, sorry....
DR. MALKA	Ms Sukers, so we're coming towards the end of the conversation, there's many more things that I would love to have asked you, but now I want to reflect a little bit more from a personal point of view with yourself. One of the questions that I always ask my guests who've made tremendous achievements in their respective fields is about the factors that they consider have contributed to their success; in your opinion what would you say have been some of your key drivers?
MP MARIE SUKERS	Books.
DR. MALKA	Books?
MP MARIE SUKERS	Books. Absolutely. I've been an avid reader since I...I didn't even start school yet and I could read and books have been my best friend and it opened a world to me beyond the farm that I lived in...on. My mother is illiterate but my steady supply of books was given to me by an aunt and then it was followed up by teachers and the key drivers in my life really was books and reading, one of the key drivers, and being surrounded by people that really believed in me, you know, and really gave me the opportunity to further myself. One of the key people in my life is a woman from the Netherlands, she's now from the Netherlands but she was in South Africa, she's a South African and I would say that has been one of the greatest catalysts for my growth was working in an environment with a woman who really believed in the advancement of the individual in every single thing she did, you know, and for me that was a catalyst and I seek the same in everybody that I employ, whether it is in my business or that I engage with whether it be in projects to provide that same kind of environment to advance them because it has played such a big role in my life.
DR. MALKA	Can you share an example?
MP MARIE SUKERS	An example that I use or an example that was done to me?
DR. MALKA	Whichever you'd like.
MP MARIE SUKERS	When I started working with Madeline Van der.....many years ago, she is now of course a professor at Leiden University, when I started working with her I was a young woman that had a great desire for knowledge and just a strong drive for change, changing communities because I came from a ministerial background, I was a pastor and she provided me with an opportunity to come and work with her and within a week she found out I'm not a very good administrator and she put me through a couple of tests and assessments and came back to me and she says you know what, the bad news is I employed you in a job that you're definitely not going to thrive in and the good news is that I think you need to find your niche, just do what you love to do, you know, and she worked it out and for three years she was my mentor and I was her mentee. It accelerated my learning in a way that you won't believe, still today the things that I...the leadership principles that I apply in my own life is because of what I see, what was demonstrated to me, you know, an acceptance of who you are number one, secondly to embrace your...not only your...not to look at your weaknesses but to really celebrate your strengths and to never allow yourself...to assess yourself based on your weaknesses but to really celebrate who you are and make sure that whatever you do, you do it based on your strengths, not on your weaknesses, it's the greatest lesson she taught me.
DR. MALKA	Those are great drivers and come from a place that I see of as abundance, that you've got a much fuller perspective. Could you share some of the pivotal moments in your life growing up?

MP MARIE SUKERS	I think for me the most...the person that played a vital role in my life is my mother really. She, you know, was sold to my father at the age of twelve, she was kidnapped from her house and she was sold at the age of twelve and the woman that raised me was never a victim. She raised me with such a strong sense of responsibility, your responsibility firstly to yourself and then your responsibility to others. Secondly, she never allowed me to give up, never, you know, she believed that I can be better. We grew up on a farm and she would always say the same thing. She would say you can be poor, you can...you don't need to be dirty. She could say you know you can be poor but you need to work hard. She never allowed you to have a pity party, you know, you could never stay in bed and feel that you know I'm taking a day off. With my mother there was no days off, it served me in my life, her whole ethic of hard work you know and I think if I didn't have that I wouldn't have been able to capitalise the opportunities that was given to me.
DR. MALKA	She sounds like someone with strong values and strong ethics.
MP MARIE SUKERS	She still is today.
DR. MALKA	Now finally, as we close our conversation today, could you share a few words of inspiration or wisdom that you'd like to pass onto young ladies that are listening to us?
MP MARIE SUKERS	I firstly want to say to young women you truly live in the most beautiful of times. You live in a time where there's trailblazers that have gone before you and you are walking a path that is already set before you and the one thing that I would like young women to remember is how precious you are, all of you. All of you. Every single thing about you as an individual is precious and is worthwhile, you are worthwhile. You are worthwhile and that is a key lesson of advancement, unless you see yourself as truly worthy of success, truly worthy of a life that is meaningful, you will never be able to embrace opportunities fully and so my message to young women is know this, you are worth it, every single bit of you is worth it, doesn't matter where you come from.
DR. MALKA	Thank you very much for that powerful message, it's been a pleasure having you on our show today.
MP MARIE SUKERS	It's been a pleasure really to have this discussion with you I must say, thank you Dr. Malka.
PROGRAMME END	