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PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: HER EXCELLENCY FATOUMATA JALLOW TAMBAJANG – FORMER VICE PRESIDENT & MINISTER OF WOMEN AFFAIRS FROM THE GAMBIA

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 from Cape Town, South Africa, from the African Women's Innovation and Entrepreneurship Forum is the former Vice President and Minister of Women Affairs from the Gambia; Her Excellency Fatoumata Jallow Tambajang. Welcome to the show!
HE MRS. TAMBAJANG	Thank you, thank you for having me.
DR. MALKA	It's always such a privilege to host someone like you who's lit the torch which lights the path for women, particularly in Africa, to make their respective journey's possible and I must say that when I was doing research on this show for you in this interview, it made such an impact on my views as a woman and a person and I think that your personal and political journey has invaluable lessons for other women across the continent to follow. So, to start with, please tell us, when did you realise that politics and serving your country would be such an integral part of your life?
HE MRS. TAMBAJANG	I realised that women were not represented in the power structures and that meant a lot, that's where the cake is shared and if we're not represented then it means we're going to take whatever is left. So, I got the inspiration and fortunately I come from a background where women are very strong. I lost my father very young and I found my mother very, very strong; standing up to things she wanted to do and making a difference in her community and her life and at the same time supporting us as four daughters, ensuring that we are not left behind in anything. So, I went with this dream and I worked with the United Nations, first of all, I was a young mother, I was married young. I got divorced at the age of 21 after having four children and then I followed my dream, I wanted to become a doctor, a medical doctor, gynaecologist because of the need in our country and Africa in general and at the same but fortunately because...fortunately or unfortunately I was unable to follow my first vocation, I became a social scientist and then a politician by default because of the situation back in the Gambia. I studied...instead of studying medicine I went to...as an adult learner, I went back to school, did my advanced education and then went to Dakar University, Senegal and then France and then got re-married and got four children, so I have gender equality, four boys and four girls, I must say four young men and four young women and I have seven grandchildren. Then in 2000 I decided to join the struggle in my country where for 22 years we had an autocratic rule where it was just one-way traffic. It was either the executive or nothing else and I realised that there were political parties, who for 22 years, were joining just to find a niche for each of them individually. Each one wanted to be a president and I thought that I should come and join the struggle; create a new platform together with other like-minded men and women to create a coalition, which is called Coalition 2016, which was created and launched in October 2016. And this is coalition comprises seven

	<p>political parties, two national independent parliamentarians, two representatives of civil society, including humble self and we went to elections without nothing because we know that women, together with men, can create...can move mountains. We decided to fundraise, local level, international level, including the diaspora. We got money, funding, we decided to use the funding we had with strategic thinking and actions. We went to...we did a lot of campaigns, strategic campaigns, all throughout the country, which is a country of 1.8 million people, 51% of which are women. We did the campaign; we did nomination, we did the elections and finally we won by 18,000 votes and this was how we won...we took over our country in a democratic way; that is through the ballot box. So...</p>
DR. MALKA	That is a significant achievement in a relatively short space of time; forming the coalition in 2016....
HE MRS. TAMBAJANG	...yes....
DR. MALKA	...gaining the support and being able to drive the change, it shows that there was an appetite of readiness in the country.
HE MRS. TAMBAJANG	Yes definitely, people wanted change and more so we must admit that women and young people, the youth, are predominantly the main actors of this change.
DR. MALKA	Reflecting back on the years in that build-up of coming through with the, you know, the 22 years prior to coming into power and where The Gambia is positioned at the moment, as a country politically, do you feel that it's on track for effecting the right type of transformation to move forwards?
HE MRS. TAMBAJANG	Actually, something that I left out in terms of my profession is that I've been working...I worked for the United Nations Development Programme and I was able to create great partnerships with many international organisations, including the World Bank, the IMF, The African Development Bank and so forth and this was part of my portfolio when I was working in Development. So that alone helped me in strategic thinking and strategic actions and fortunately when we became a government, when we established the government, I was privileged to be appointed as Vice President and Minister of Women's Affairs and from that point of view we didn't find anything in the coffers. We had just one month's income cover, so it needed a lot of creativity and innovation, strategic thinking, quick action to mobilise resources. So we mobilised resources, we had the National Agenda which is a reform agenda; constitutional reform, land reform, civil service reform, judicial reform, security service reform and all name it, put under conciliation because the social fabric was broken during the 22 years. Families don't speak with the other, friends don't speak with the other, everyone to be feared, the National Intelligence Agency, the Security Service, the pointers were the tools used by the Executive to incarcerate and to persecute people, Gambian people, innocent people and this of course moved almost like 30 to 40% of our population into the diaspora, talent and ingenuity, most of Gambia is 1.8 million but your size comparative to the people; your human capital, suffices, you find them in many high positions in many international organisations. So now what we've been doing, we're trying to transform. We've got the change, we fought for the change, and fortunately we've got to change, now our challenge is how to manage the change by quickly implementing the Reform Agenda. Already the Constitutional Reform Agenda is almost completed, then we will have a referendum and then finally we will eventually the Executive will be able to enact in close collaboration with the citizenry and what it would do would be to separate the powers; the three powers of the Executive which is the

	<p>executive, the legislature and the judiciary, which, for 22 years, was just one arm of government which is just the Executive and it will give also broader participation to people. People's voices will be heard. We are also fighting and in terms of true advocacy a strategic lobbying to have quota system in the constitution that would allow women to be represented in all structures of government, including at the local level where there you'll find economic actors in agriculture, in fishing, in all the productive sectors of the economy and then also having women as politicians, why not? Trying to educate women and empowering women to vote for women so that they can...and voting not only for women per se but voting for competent women, women who can champion because of women and not only for their own cause. So, we are moving forward, it's like a post-conflict situation....</p>
DR. MALKA	...yes, it is....
HE MRS. TAMBAJANG	<p>...yes, a post-conflict situation, so it will take time, but at the same time we need to hurry up to deliver the expectations, to meet the expectations. We have 22% unemployment among young people, the public sector cannot absorb everyone so what we need to do is to create that enabling environment where they can feel comfortable, enter the labour market and particularly young people, young women. So today in The Gambia the democratic dividend is paying, you have many young people establishing their own businesses. We cannot be complacent with that, we need to have at least everyone; no-one left behind so that we can grow the economy and particularly through innovation creativity and today we are here with the African Women Innovation and Entrepreneurship Forum, which is a formidable organisation, women driven organisation, which has brought diverse people to Cape Town; financiers, civil society, media, all the stakeholders and women in...business women, practitioners, development practitioners and so forth and what we are planning to do is to use that diversity as a strength to promote the agenda, which is of course, the agenda to prioritising and helping to promote the operational assertion of the African Free Trade Agreement. And coming back to Gambia, we have signed, fortunately, we are one of the 27 countries that has signed the agreement. Now at all levels, international, local and Gambian level, we will try to ensure that women participate in the mainstream of the implementation of the African Continental Trade Agreement and at the same time benefit from it in terms of having the required resources, having the required capacity building and supporting their enterprises so that they can grow the economy or contribute meaningfully or more meaningfully in the economy of their local communities, which of course, will go into the national economy and finally we can have inclusive growth, inclusive wealth creation in the benefit of everyone. Ja, we do hope that the Security Reform also will help where we can democratise the security sector to understand they are there not to govern, not to intimidate, but rather to be at the service, the protection of the state and people's property; lives and property. So, it's moving. It's moving. I have a lot of hope, a lot of people also have hope, of course we do have criticism from here to there but then that is what should make us stronger and move the process forward so that we continue to respond to the expectations of our citizens and finally we will become a model of democracy in not only Africa but the world at large.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>That's a fantastic aspiration and thank you very much for sharing some of the outcomes that you're hoping to take away from the Women Innovation and Entrepreneurship Forum, particularly into the Gambian labour market. One of the very important things that you mentioned was the notion of bringing more women into political leadership, more women who are competent, who can</p>

	effectively drive change and we consider on this programme that developing female leadership capacity is important for the future of women, not only to our countries, but also to the continent. However, in recent history there has been a handful of female presidents, female vice presidents in the continent, whether it's in Malawi, Liberia, Mauritius, The Gambia and Namibia; how do you see female leadership from a continental perspective?
HE MRS. TAMBAJANG	<p>From a continental perspective it's like one foot forward and two feet backward. We come or we count the one, two three, like Ma Ellen Johnson President Excellency of Liberia, we found Namibia also had a vice presidency in Liberia but at some point you find that rather than progressing, increasing in numbers, sometimes we decrease. We work with the men, we help them, we support them and sometimes we even guide them and play instrumental roles in ensuring that they achieve their political goals but once they feel comfortable, most times is to elbow the women out and some women who feel discouraged and frustrated go backward and sometimes you never hear about them, but my vision is that this is just the challenge that can be overcome by bringing women, African women together, bringing local women, national women together, strengthening the women's movements and also building their capacity, the political capacity, ensuring that you have partners that are willing to support the process so that finally we can transform the mentality; the cultural barriers that make it patriarchal that men only should rule. It's a world of equality and ensuring that we take governments...take them into accountability, we hold them accountable in terms of the instruments that they have signed. The Universal declaration of Human Rights 1979 hinges upon everybody, every government to ensure that everybody has equal rights, including political rights. The Convention on all forms of discrimination against women, the UN.....also holds men governments to ensure that women participate in every aspect of life and then we also have the UN 1325 Convention; Women, Peace and Security, so you have the SDG's (Social Development Goals) where the epicentre is the women's...the necessity and the urgency for governments to ensure that there is equality, there is a good quota system and what they should understand, men should understand, in particular political leaders, is that gender equality brings more dividends not only in terms of equality but equity, justice, because equality is justice, a social justice. In building the social justice platform women must be in the agenda negotiating table, must be in the power structures, to work hand-in-hand to help develop the capacity of men to understand that women are partners, women are the mothers, they are the caregivers, they have a triple role and minus the triple role you cannot have sustainable human development, you cannot have sustainable development...achieve your sustainable development goals. So, it is just a question of ensuring that your whole government's accountable to social justice. We are both, men, women, boys and girls, part and parcel of the decision-making process. We have a lot of challenges but they can be overcome through training, social mobilisation, capacity building...strategic capacity building and also ensuring the partners invest monies, do a lot of investment, increase their investment in building the capacities of women in the different productive areas like entrepreneurship, which of course is a catalyst in growing the economy in enhancing women's participation in every sphere of life.</p>
DR. MALKA	Joining us on the line from Cape Town, South Africa, from the African Women's Innovation and Entrepreneurship Forum is the former Vice President and Minister of Women Affairs from The Gambia; Her Excellency Fatoumata Jallow Tambajang

DR. MALKA	You've managed to succeed, you've got to the top and you've been such an advocate of women's rights, apart from serving as the Minister of Women Affairs in The Gambia and now currently being on the Gambia Women's Finance Agency. In the past you chaired The Gambia National Women's Council, you advised the previous regime on women's issues and children's affairs. Please tell us about some of the issues that you drove to benefit women of the country.
HE MRS. TAMBAJANG	<p>While I as working with the United Nations Development Programme in The Gambia I was privileged to be appointed as the chair of the National Women's Council and the dominant mandate was to ensure that we domesticate those international instruments and also the constitution, which provides equality and equity for men and women, boys and girls, to ensure that these are implemented, these are enforced toand what I drove was to ensure that we have gender responsive policies and legislation that will allow us to have equal opportunities. We were also able to drive in a fifteen million multi-sectoral programme supporting the capacity building of women in different areas, ranging from literacy, numeracy, enterprise development, business development and partnership and also helping them in small micro-financing and then also we were able to do...have a lot of partners and within that perspective we established The Gambia Women's Finance Association. I was the first convenor of The Gambia Women's Finance Association and as chairperson of the council where I advised government that it should support...it needed to support the launch and strengthening of the association. So, we got diverse funders which is mainly to provide micro-financing for low income women, women who cannot afford to get...who don't have collateral, women who don't have public voices, women who cannot access any form of financial assistance. So, we were able to establish from our own and it's a non-profit making organisation which of course has a vision of finally establishing the first women's bank in The Gambia. We have so far fifty thousand women, including other maybe men, like 30% men in the organisation and what we do is of course is provide them with micro-financing, supporting their micro-enterprise development, starting from the micro to the macro level and ensuring that we give them opportunities for joint ventures from the domestic level, from the international level and also we are in the length and breadth of the country. We are countrywide, we have 15 branches countrywide, we have the micro-financing mobile savings, a very innovating savings which is the mobile banking. We also have the mobile phone which we started in partnership with one of our companies called QCell and we really want to penetrate the innovation and creativity to bring more opportunities to women. At the same time, at the level of UNDP I was able to champion some of the success stories like focusing on women, like salt production. At some point when we started, we found that salt production was at the local level, quality assurance was not given, marketing was not given but then we supported it and then from 50 thousand US Dollars I was able to champion it to 500 thousand dollars, where women were...women salt producers were sent to India to study the quality and marketing of salt and we brought in a Ghanaian expert who was also helping to have the technicalities at the operational level and I was also doing...working in the area of land development where you bring cattle in the cattle growing areas, where you bring them together, have...grow...give them good...cattle and sheep fattening, animal husbandry where you can fatten the goats and the cattle and growtheir feed, quality feed, so that they can be more marketable, have more price, not only in The Gambia but outside the region. So I was also...what I was...I worked in all most of these sectors, including economic capacity building, land development. I also worked in the area of</p>

	<p>building the capacity of women leadership and advocating for women. When you are a woman leader you want to make a difference, you need to be everywhere. Being everywhere doesn't mean you are stretching yourself, you are limiting your capacity, it's you have to learn, you have to be attuned to what is happening in terms of development, in terms of politics and in terms of social entrepreneurship. So as a leader we need to bring...my satisfaction today is to look behind and leave a legacy of many young women and of my age, that will continue to be committed to championing the course of women so that some day Gambia can be like Rwanda, can be like Uganda. Rwanda you have 60% of women....</p>
DR. MALKA	...yes there is...
HE MRS. TAMBAJANG	<p>...in political structures, it's not impossible, all we need is just to have...continue to build a critical mass of women leaders, build their capacity, give them the courage, support them to continue and most important in my message is that never feel frustrated by leaving power or by being sucked from a position, it should...you should transform that as an opportunity to create a new platform, a greater platform where you can advocate for women to be empowered, to believe in themselves and to have the support and to network at different levels, to the continent, that level, just like I'm participating in this AWIEF programme. Remain relevant. Remain relevant by continuing to see where you fell short, improve upon that and strengthen your capacity and have the courage and resilience to remain in the course. It is a struggle, it is not going to be easy, but we can do it and I am there to champion and I would like to join all the women in Africa and even internationally, whoever can provide more capacity for me in terms of competence, in terms of advocacy, in terms of resources; I will be there to join you to advocate, to champion and to practically share the experience, practical experience that I have acquired over the years both at the level of government and international community. Best of all what I would call on the women is we have to have accountability in whatever we are given. Transparency, accountability, our integrity must be intact.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>You are so right about everything that you have said and you've shared some fantastic examples of real life success stories that are enabling women economically and socially within The Gambia and reaching out to expertise in other countries to absorb that back into the country. I have to ask you now more on a personal level, one of the things with 'Womanity – Women in Unity' our programme, it's about celebrating women's achievements in their various struggles. You mentioned that at 21 years of age you had already had four children, you were divorced, you then went on to continue your education through adult based learning, you now have four children on equal... sorry, eight children, four of each gender; can you please share with us some of the obstacles that you encountered as a woman whilst you were building your career, to demonstrate to other people that are listening to our show, that successful women like you and the achievements that you have made weren't presented to you on a silver platter, it required hard work and sacrifice.</p>
HE MRS. TAMBAJANG	<p>First of all it needs a vision; it needs a commitment and it needs a mission. The vision will drive you as to how high. The vision for me is achieving what no man thinks you can achieve; making a difference. The mission is focusing on how to achieve your vision and you need courage also, you need support, the social system in Gambian context and in the African context my parents, my sisters, my relatives were there to support me, to give me that social system where I can concentrate and focus on my new vision which is to really have the required competence, the knowledge and the experience to be able to make change, to effect change and to bring a wealth of women, a wealth</p>

of knowledge and skills shared with the younger women and women of my age because in Africa sometimes once you have one child they say oh...some of the challenges, as you asked me, some of the challenges that the...people will not believe you after having children that you can make it. They feel that you are so busy with rearing the children, caring for them, that you wouldn't have time. So what you need is to ensure, to prove them, to first of all believe in yourself, that you can make it, you have the vision and you know what you want and you know why you want it. So, that was number one; that was a barrier. Secondly people thought that when I...with those children, four children after divorce, it would be so difficult economically to raise them and to give them the right type of upbringing in terms of also opportunities, that was one. I thought that if I am educated, surely my children would not go through what I went through, I will give them the right education, so most of my children were raised well, a good upbringing because that is also important, the cultural aspect. Knowing where you belong, you respect your culture, you respect other people, you respect for the individual and you inspire them; be a role model for them. Living by example or doing by example; those were the challenges that I had. Also funding, when I was going to school everybody was saying, going back to adult learning, people thought, even including the government, some government people, scholarship boards were saying well, she already has a child, how about why don't we invest in a younger person but I proved them wrong. I asked them, I convinced them through my interviews that I would make it and because I want...I knew what I wanted, and I know that I was going to be able to achieve it with God's grace. I convinced them, I was given a scholarship, I went to Dakar University, first of all I did my advanced level with Rapid Results College and then which was paid by me, while I was also studying as adult learnt, I remember putting my last daughter, my first daughter on my back studying on the candle light when there was no electricity. I remember doing all my house...supporting my mom, even though we had domestic workers I really wanted to be close to my mom to help her because she was a hard working woman and then again I went to teach, I was teaching in a junior high school in my community and also studying at the same time. So, my triple role was taking care of my children, educating myself, improving my life and at the same time wanting to be where I want to. Then I went to...I got the scholarship, I went to Dakar University, from there I went to France and studied and got a BA in French Language and Civilisation; came back and worked with the UN. I was not an economist, neither was I a social scientist, but when I came, I worked for 26 years with the UN. I feel comfortable because I kept on my professional development in the forefront as the opportunity to influence decisions, influence policies, particularly political decision making. I learnt how to...I became a development practitioner and up to today at my age I'm still learning, I'm still reading, I'm still inter-networking, I'm still listening to the radio, the media and I'm interacting with all people, intellectuals, different levels. I never stop learning and I have taught my children never to stop learning. If you want to be relevant, if you want to effect change or be part of change, the change we want, particularly within the context of Africa Agenda 2063; the Social Development Agenda, you need to be relevant, you need to have the knowledge and skills, you need to have the leadership/ This is not something you get at a platter, you need to...change is not something that comes to you, you have to be the one...you have to be the change you want and you have to join other people to have a social cohesion and support women's solidarity to effect the change that women want in order to advance our agenda. No-one is going to do it. We have to make space, create space,

	lobby, advocate, negotiate to be at that table at the political...highest political level where we can be heard, our voices can be heard and not individual voices, but voices that are willing and are focused on championing the advancement of the women's agenda.
DR. MALKA	You are so determined, so focused and such an advocate for lifelong learning to bring about change and continual relevance.
HE MRS. TAMBAJANG	Thank you.
DR. MALKA	We are unfortunately running out of time on our show, there's many, many more things I would have loved to ask you, but in closing the conversation today, could you please share a few words of inspiration or wisdom that you'd like to pass onto young ladies who are listening to us on the continent?
HE MRS. TAMBAJANG	My inspiration, my message would be stay relevant to the conversation. Be active in the conversation. Find a niche for yourself, for your community and your country. Never give up, never despair, keep going, keep learning and keep implementing the things you learn, keep sharing the knowledge you learn, the experiences you have. Keep networking, not only with women, bring along the men, because cultural barriers are patriarchal and the only way we can bridge those cultural barriers in terms of accessing education, in terms of accessing resources at the equal level is to ensure that you bring them on board, you enlighten them, they understand the issues, they embrace the issues and at the end of the day you will definitely be there where you want to. Have a vision. So have a vision, focus on the vision, achieve your vision and your satisfaction should always be looking behind and saying uplifting the majority of our women and young people in the rural areas so that they can also some day be in the mainstream, the spotlight of development. But also have equal opportunity to transform their lives, to have the energy that is required,energy to have the right infrastructure, to have the ICT digitalisation infrastructure to participate in the implementation of the African Trade...ah African Continental Trade Agreement and all other agreements that are in the benefit of the world and your country at large and ensure that you are part and parcel of decision making. Never give up. Africa depends on you. You are the human capital. You are a force to be reckoned with so stay relevant and you will be a driving force to effect change that Africa wants, that your country wants, that your communities want so that at the end of the day you can be satisfied that you have achieved your vision and your mission.
DR. MALKA	Thank you so much for sharing your passion, sharing your energy and really practical advice. We appreciate your time today.
HE MRS. TAMBAJANG	Thank you so much for having me and I do hope that this conversation is going to continue wherever I am....
DR. MALKA	...absolutely....
HE MRS. TAMBAJANG	...because the media, the media is very important. The media, we need the media in every aspect of life. We cannot share experience when the media is not there, it plays an instrumental role. My advice to the media is to also go downstream and hear the voices of the vulnerable groups, uplifting their lives, giving them examples, profiling them so that other women can emulate and say that poverty is not a cause, it's a challenge and it can be overcome. That social exclusion is not a cause, it is people who create it and people can overcome it so that at the point of day, both you will never have that divide between rural and urban women, young people and rural urban people. It's a social justice where everybody should live equally, have decent lives, access to basic resources and transform their lives into decent human beings so that they can champion, continue alsothe women's movement in

	championing the advancement of women. Which is of course a dividend to society and the continent as a whole.
DR. MALKA	Thank you, well we look forward to continuing the conversation.
HE MRS. TAMBAJANG	Thank you, thank you for having me.
DR. MALKA	It's been an absolute pleasure.
HE MRS. TAMBAJANG	I wish you all the best and I wish your network all the best.
DR. MALKA	Thank you so much.
HE MRS. TAMBAJANG	You're welcome.
DR. MALKA	PROGRAMME END