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PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: THE HONOURABLE FATOU K JAWARA – THE GAMBIA – AT THE PAN AFRICAN PARLIAMENT IN MIDRAND

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	Today we are broadcasting live from the Pan African Parliament in Midrand and today we are speaking to Honourable Fatou K Jawara who is from the Gambia. Welcome to the show!
HONOURABLE JAWARA	Thank you very much.
DR. MALKA	Honourable Jawara, I understand that in your portfolio in The Gambia, you look after gender, health, women, children, refugees, humanitarian relief. You also sit on the Defence and Security committees and you also have a responsibility with the Independent Electoral Commissions Ombudsman. Firstly, can you tell us more about some of the work that you do as well as the responsibilities that come with these roles?
HONOURABLE JAWARA	Thank you very much. I am very grateful to serve in these various committees. One of my priority committees is gender, which is health, women, children, disaster and humanitarian relief. I believe there should be gender parity and whatever a man can do, a woman can do. In my country women constitute 51% of the population, but yet still, they lag behind. They cannot decide on their own health; you want to join family planning and plan for your health, you have to take permission from somebody like a husband which I think is so unfair, ya, and again we are left behind. Most of the higher positions are not held by women, they are held by men; most of the positions held by women are secretarial positions, ya. We all understand that life is a fundamental human right but how many women dies by giving birth; that also inspired me to be in the health committee.
DR. MALKA	Thank you for sharing some of those points and I always find it so enlightening when we have conversations with people across the continent, that for me, the stark thing that you are saying here is that women are relying on other people for their family planning and for their health and they are not allowed to take ownership of their bodies in order to look after their fertility and choices of if they want to have children or not.
HONOURABLE JAWARA	Yes I believe, for instance if we have more women representatives in our cadres like the Islamic Court; that women can decide on their own, rather than the men judges. In the judiciary system, if we have more women representatives, in the health system whereby the birth attendants, most of them will be women and they will understand how the women went through, though men are so supportive, but we need like numbers of women participation.
DR. MALKA	And what do you think we need to do from the point of view in The Gambia to increase the representation of women across the different sectors?
HONOURABLE JAWARA	To increase the representatives of the women I think we need to introduce the quota system, like 30% reserve seat for female, if not, it will be very difficult because most people prefer men to lead them than women.

DR. MALKA	And it's interesting when you say that, you're saying most people, when I have had conversations sometimes it's actually women as well as men who are comfortable with male leadership as opposed to female leadership.
HONOURABLE JAWARA	Yes it's this cultural belief. For instance, in The Gambia, the discrimination starts from our own family, if you are a particular child, a family is blessed with a boy and a girl child, the boy will be free, after school he might go to football field, he might be conducting studies while the girl child will be at home helping the mom. So for sometimes their performance in school, male perform more than female but it's a gradual process, it start changing now, but during my time most of the time boys perform more than girls and sometimes women are not allowed to take leadership positions because many believe that women are just caregivers.
DR. MALKA	And it's such a narrow perspective when you think of the work that you do, the multiplicity and capability that women achieve. For a moment, looking at the fact that we operate in a globally connected society and thinking that we are here at the Pan African Conference, we've got fifty-four countries in the continent; can you tell us about some of the collaborations that you are doing with other countries on the continent?
HONOURABLE JAWARA	Yes, thank you very much, quite interesting question. Like if you look Pan African Parliament as a whole, every country is delegating five, among which one must be a female, but if I may learn from Rwanda experience, they have more female representative and during my interaction with them I stole from their ideas that sometimes I sit with my womenfolk and tell them that we can take Rwanda and other countries as examples, how women are represented in the parliament.
DR. MALKA	So you can take that learning back to The Gambia to try and institute.
HONOURABLE JAWARA	Ya.
DR. MALKA	And are there any other components, so if you have a particular programme, for instance I know with Tanzania, they have a sector where they try to donate sanitary pads for menstruating girls into rural areas; are there any special projects that you are working on in The Gambia in relation to women and girls?
HONOURABLE JAWARA	Ya that project that I am working on right now is to help the women farmers in their garden to get their seeds and let them be provided with irrigation method because we have three months rainy season and the other three months they have to...and let them introduce the irrigation method, if the government can do that so that they can sell their products at whatever price there is.
DR. MALKA	And the reality is that women tend to be the core workers of the land.
HONOURABLE JAWARA	Ya.
DR. MALKA	So in this instance we are looking at components where they are not only dealing with self-sustainability for the family, but also being able to produce products to go to commercial market.
HONOURABLE JAWARA	Yes, Gambian women are so hardworking, ya, they don't rely on their husbands, it's a win/win situation, the husband will be on this side and the wife will be another side supporting the family.
DR. MALKA	And this reminds me of a conversation that we had with your former Vice President, Honourable Fatoumata Jallow Tambajang. I wanted to ask you, when we're talking about women at work, so from an agricultural point of view to now looking at women in the labour force itself, women's participation has incredibly important macro-economic contributions but when we look at women at work, often they tend to be underpaid compared to their

	male counterparts, so for example in South Africa, on average, women earn less than 23% of their male counterpart's wage. What do you think we need to do to help improve the odds of equal pay?
HONOURABLE JAWARA	Yes, I think one, it's very difficult for women because if you, for instance, you are married with somebody or you have grown up in a society where you realise your rights, you know your rights, but your rights is not realised by somebody who you are working with or whom you are married with, it's always difficult, but what we need to do, we need to upgrade the capacity of women in the education sector because if I could take myself as an example, I was not fortunate to go up to the university level, so after my secondary school career I have to go in and marry, when I didn't have any work to do because I belong to the major opposition party so I was not lucky to work, I have to go in a marriage at a very early age. So I was in the burden of marriage for the last ten / twelve years, so it was after that I was in the forefront of a struggle to dislodge a tyrant because we have a government that came through a coup d'etat so there are a lot of human rights violations, attack on political opponents, disappearance of journalists. So I say this is our country and we must take back our country. So I engaged in serious sensitisation campaigns on platforms, radio, TV and I was so popular and I was recognised by many women groups, so they elected...they nominated me to be their representative during the local government election in 2008. At that time I was very young, which I narrowly lose by the ruling party. From there I continued with the struggle again.
DR. MALKA	Thank you for sharing some of your history and journey into politics. On the 8 th of March globally, the world celebrates International Women's Day; in your opinion, you have shared that education is one of the key areas to help close that gap between salaries; what do you think we need to do to build on the most to benefit women in the future?
HONOURABLE JAWARA	What we need to do to benefit women in the future, we need to encourage them. For instance, in the school system or university system, if the entry is hundred percent for male, they need to break it down to 80% for women to incorporate them because they cannot concentrate on their books when they are going to school, many believe that women are just caregivers, they should be at the side of the mom, helping her, in labour works and so on. So, to help them to be something in the future tomorrow, they need to scale down the map of the entry at the university level and at the workplace also, when a woman is serving for two / three years, at least it should help her to upgrade and get to university to do something, but somebody might be in a secretarial position and the person will be there for decades, she will not be promoted. Even if you can look into our own parliament, sometimes you will see men they are not performing but people still clap for them, but if a woman makes any mistake of not performing, people will start to use abusive language on her. So I think that cyber bullying we also need to look into.
DR. MALKA	So if your wish-list comes true, that we have the right education in place, that we are able to empower women with skills, that we have quota systems to help level the playing field, that we open opportunities to allow women to access; what would your ideal world look like in say twenty years' time?
HONOURABLE JAWARA	Ya you know when we are equally represented, we are the voice of the voiceless, the parliament, in the executive, that will address the situation of female...women, but if you are in a number of thousands of men sometimes you will address your situation, they will just give a lip service but at the end they will throw it in a bin.

DR. MALKA	So they absolutely need to get more women in visibility and represented in government structures.
HONOURABLE JAWARA	Ya.
DR. MALKA	Whilst we are talking about the representation of women, I always think that we are severely, and in fact I don't say think, it's a fact, women are severely underrepresented in terms of female leadership and building female leadership capacity is important for the future of women across the world, but there is still so very few female political leaders. Australia had a female prime minister; Julia Gillard, at the moment New Zealand has a female prime minister; Jacinda Ardern and on the continent, on all fifty-four countries, we only have one female president of Ethiopia. Do you think more countries are ready for a woman president or prime minister?
HONOURABLE JAWARA	Maybe in the future it could be, but as at now I believe it will be a very hard battle. It will be a very hard battle because with the amount of intimidation in politics, the amount of character assassination, I believe maybe in Europe, but in Africa most women will not come out to participate in politics because if I can take myself as an example, when I was in the struggle people told me everything. They said how can this...they have no money, they have nothing, how can they approve a dictator, so sometimes you go, you want to talk to people, they send you out, they don't listen to you but we still maintain our stand and say this is our country, it is meant for us we have to fight back. So we struggle and struggle, later we were taken to prison because we were dealing with a brutal dictator, in our entire youth wing executive members we are taken to...we are severely tortured at the state intelligence service until an extended they announced the three of us died, I and two female, so they prepare our burial arrangement and everything. So that made many female to come out and say look, these young ladies who died for the country, we are not better than them so we must see that this man, we kick him out of the country. So before we all have our political parties and our political differences, but they come and form a coalition of six political parties, including one independent, they have vote against <i>Jamed</i> after the change of government then we are pardoned by the foreign region.
DR. MALKA	Having gone through that experience, how does it make you feel on the machinery of democracy, the machinery of the beliefs that you had and the actions you took to oust a dictator so that you could start formulating a country that is right for all?
HONOURABLE JAWARA	It motivates me a lot; one, I know that my rights will never be tampered by anybody and I will ever go in for whatever rightfully belongs to me or whatever woman it belongs to and I will not allow women discriminatory law to be in my parliament because if there was a law that was safeguarding women, what we went through will not happen, but the challenges that I have now is that many believe, many politicians believe that if they saw you have been in the struggle, you are fighting for them, they can champion it, call you a good person but when the landscape is changed and now that you are in the forefront of the struggle now, you are doing everything for them, but in turn now, they want you to be influenced by their party ideology and you say no, this is our country, this is what we fought for; they will fight you back. That is the challenges that I am going through, so I believe many women will not want to go through what I went through because sometimes if you look at the social media platform, many of my party militants abuse it. They go against

	<p>me, they are insulting me, you are going after the president, I have said no, I am not going after the president, this is a transition government that the campaign that they should serve three years if there is a possibility, but there is nothing specific in our constitution that says that the president should serve three years, if he wishes he can resign after three years, but with the current situation of my country, it's very unsafe because we have a newfound democracy, a juvenile one, so the security sector reform is going...the constitutional review commissioner is going, lot of commissioner of enquiries are going, the truth reconciliation and reparation commission, where victims and perpetrators will come and narrate their stories. So how can you push me to go against that government to do another election? Which, I believe is unacceptable, so these people are going against me, they label me, they name all...they give me all type of name that the president has given me money to go against my party and this president is from my own party. And when we fight, I went to prison, he was the treasurer of our party, then he was elected from my party to be the flagbearer and backed by other political parties, so I cannot betray the trust of those political parties for my party, so I stood up for my word but the amount of intimidation but I say no, I am not worried. I have fight the battle and won my battle and nobody can make the battle a lose battle for me, so I proceed with what I believe.</p>
DR. MALKA	I hear your strength, I hear your bravery, I hear your courage of going against conventional thinking to stand up as a woman in your own right and beliefs.
	AD BREAK
DR. MALKA	Today we are talking to Honourable Fatou K Jawara from The Gambia at the Pan African Parliament. We would love to receive your comments on Twitter:@WomanityTalk.
DR. MALKA	Honourable Jawara, our programme, 'Womanity – Women in Unity' is all about gender equality, which is increasingly a global focus and taking into consideration the challenges and successes that women's legal rights have had over the years and listening to your narrative and the struggles that you are trying to do of just to get to 30%, in reality do you think that 50/50% representation can be achieved?
HONOURABLE JAWARA	Yes it can be because with the current democratic situation that we fought for and the one that Gambia has now, there is a possibility because everybody realise his or her right and women are coming to show up their self in the political arena, but the cyber bullying is discouraging most women. The cyber bullying by some political parties is discouraging most women but they have the capability, they have the experience, they have the capacity because they constitute 51%, any political party in my country if you are not backed by a woman, say just go and relax, you cannot win election, but the amount of castigation, intimidation meted out on women are discouraging them.
DR. MALKA	Well, we hope that you continue in your vain of strength to rise above the cyber bullying and the tactics that are used to try to deter your strength and your guidl. You are currently attending the Pan African Parliament and various working committee sessions, I know that today is the first day, but can you tell us about some of the highlights that happened today?
HONOURABLE JAWARA	Ya we are having a workshop about child exploitation where our countries were sharing their experience and when the committee from this parliament embark on this.....some mining places where they saw child labour and how they are exploited to sexual abuse. Those are some of the things that we are highlighting.
DR. MALKA	And is there a similar problem in The Gambia?

HONOURABLE JAWARA	Yes, there is a similar problem but we have a law regulating it and we have a serious sensitisation in our legal department, the securities, and we have a CPA (Child Protection Alliance) that is protecting the rights of our children. We do have a children’s parliament also that speaks on behalf of the parliament...ah, the children.
DR. MALKA	And beyond this particular scenario of looking at the exploitation of child labour, at the end of the event, what do you hope to take away from this?
HONOURABLE JAWARA	I get the knowledge and experience to share with my country, elected representative, I got the knowledge to share with my colleagues in the community, like how one should report the case, how one should mark out the crises, the steps that need to be taken in sensitisation, radio programmes, among others.
DR. MALKA	One question that I’d like to ask you now and it’s a question I ask all my guests is about your personal journey. You’ve shared some of those insights already; some of our guests who have reached tremendous achievements in their lifetimes talk about the various factors that they feel have made them who they are today and elements of success. So to start with, can you share with us some of the pivotal moments in your life growing up?
HONOURABLE JAWARA	Yes, when I got...lose that 2008 election at a very early age, I am not discouraged, I say well this is just the beginning, let me just try back again. So I continued the struggle and register under a main political party, I started dragging women points into politics. So I became famous and when I continued with the struggle until to an end that I went to prison, after my release I was recognised by many that I should represent them in parliament. So this is how it came about.
DR. MALKA	I will never forget a conversation that I had with former president of Liberia, Ellen Sirleaf Johnson and she was talking about her time in prison and she said that “when I went to prison I knew that I had done something right”.
HONOURABLE JAWARA	Yes, same applies to me. When I was detained in the state intelligence agency, where I was in solitary confinement, I was beaten to death, so I was in a solitary confinement....I know many people have been brought here but I don’t think what was meted out of me and those two females has ever happened to anybody...any female, because we do have their stories but the amount of beating meted out on us, when we survived that in life, something is going to happen. So, when the court proceeding continues we saw people coming out protesting that we need to be released, then from there, when we go back to mile two, the same protest continued. The government feel so uncomfortable and he has to take us to Janjanbureh where will not have access to lawyer, access to family, we just been kept there like mad dogs, nobody is looking after us. The only people who have time for us is the officers to come and open the cell, we go and ease ourselves and come back. So we live there in that situation until the time that we get sentenced, before we are reminded until they make a judgement, we got sentenced. So when we are in prison we do have officers sometimes they disclose that these people need to be released because since they came here, peace never prevail in the country and every time people will be talking on media, social media platform, international medias are discussing with them, I think the president just pardon them and we heard the president Obasanjo came to beg him to pardon us, he refused, many people do so, he refused. That was the time I said this will be the end of this man.
DR. MALKA	I’m starting to get goose bumps listening to your story. Staying in this stream, so I mean having had that experience, I can’t even imagine what you went through, but what would you say coming out of that and looking at where you

	are today have been some of the factors that have contributed to your success. So for example some of my guests have spoken about hard work, a fear of failure, perseverance; what would you say have been some of the factors that you think have contributed to your success?
HONOURABLE JAWARA	I was so determined. I believed that this is my country, I was not offered anything to do it; I was just doing it voluntarily. I see something that is going on, that our country cannot move like that, so if everybody is feel sceptical, there are people who need to come and sacrifice because I learn that some countries people sacrifice for their countries to be free. So when I was doing it I am the youngest female among them, the two women that are there, they are like mother to me. When we are in prison some people are saying that oh, when we are in the struggle some people are even say that I don't know what's wrong with this lady, her family just leave her to be move in with these people who already did their life and whatever. So, really it's above explanation sometimes. I went through a lot, but with the support of my family I have made it today, ya.
DR. MALKA	We're all influenced by different people around us, whether they are mentors or role models; in your life, can you tell us who have been some of the key women that have, or rather, who have been some of the strong women in your life?
HONOURABLE JAWARA	Well, I believe in my life, before I get into the struggle, I didn't have a role model because by then I was not equipped with any knowledge but I just see some injustice taking place, so I say no to it, but as of now, we have seen the...we have seen women chiefs and village heads in my area who inspired me, ya, before I didn't know their story but through my interaction with them now they became a role model to me.
DR. MALKA	You've achieved so much in your career thus far and not just in a personal context but in terms of really doing things and driving change for The Gambia. What's next on your agenda?
HONOURABLE JAWARA	My next agenda is to see a fully fledged democratically elected...a democratic government, which I believe I have succeeded in that because in my country now everybody is free to say what you want to say or write what you want to write as well as.....Journalists are free to do whatever they want, before illegal arrests, detention and disappearance is too much, which is no more the case. We have seen a lot of empowerment in our school sectors, in the girl child's opportunity to go to school. In the judiciary system women are well represented, that also is a great achievement for me. In the cabinet we have low number because out of the nineteen executive members, the ministerial position including the vice president, only four are female, but we are still struggling. In the security sector, our last independence celebration, the parade was led by a female, which is a great achievement also, so they are now in the forefront of the face.
DR. MALKA	Those for me are achievements that are going to keep on rolling the more that you get women vested into this space. What would you say has been the best lesson so far that you've learned in your career?
HONOURABLE JAWARA	The best lesson I learn in my career is that I will never and ever support a single person, an individual, I will not love an individual, like for instance, this is one is my leader, I love him for so much so that I will sacrifice myself to an extent that I will end up being fall into a wrong hand, ya. I learned a great lesson, I really learned a great lesson. I never thought that my trust will be betrayed by my former party. I fought with them, I did everything with them, I struggled with them, I did even went to prison for my crime, I was fighting for the right of the Gambian and for

	somebody to become a president, but at the end, he kicked me out of the party, I was expelled because he is saying that I was shifting allegiance to the president and in the party he is just like a father to me and the president is just like a brother to me. We share everything together, but the amount of allegations and intimidation that I went through, shew, it's a great lesson for me.
DR. MALKA	Politics is a tough business.
HONOURABLE JAWARA	Indeed.
DR. MALKA	And lastly, as we close out our conversation today, could you share a few words of wisdom or inspiration that you'd like to pass onto girls and women that are listening to us on the continent?
HONOURABLE JAWARA	Ya I encourage women to come up because we are the largest number, let them come up and take the leadership positions because a woman feels a woman's pain. Whatever men are saying, I am not against any man, but whatever they are saying, they cannot pay serious attention to our problem, only a female who can pay attention to her female counterpart problem.
DR. MALKA	So we need more presence of women and for women to take up an active role in society?
HONOURABLE JAWARA	Yes, we need to move from commitment to action now.
DR. MALKA	I think those are fantastic words. "Moving from commitment to action".
DR. MALKA	You have been listening to 'Womanity – Women in Unity' on Channel Africa, the African Perspective and we have been talking to Honourable Fatou K Jawara who is from The Gambia and she is responsible for working in several committees; gender, health, women, children, refugees, humanitarian relief, defence and security committees, as well as in the IEC Ombudsman and we have been broadcasting from the Pan African Parliament.
	PROGRAMME END
DR. MALKA	Tune into the show next week when we continue with our conversations from the Pan African Parliament, when we talk to Dr. Jane Ongolo who is from the African Union Commission heading up the division on Social Welfare, Vulnerable Groups, Drug Control and Crime Prevention.