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GUEST NAME: DR. JAME MARIE ONGOLO - AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION –
PORTFOLIO ON SOCIAL WELFARE, VULNERABLE GROUPS, DRUG CONTROL &
CRIME PREVENTION

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're broadcasting from the Pan African Parliament in Midrand, South Africa, and we are speaking to Doctor Jane Marie Ongolo, who is originally from Kenya but her portfolio is with the African Union Commission; she heads a division on Social Welfare, Vulnerable Groups, Drug Control and Crime Prevention. Welcome to the show Dr. Ongolo!
DR. ONGOLO	Thank you very much, I am delighted to be on the show!
DR. MALKA	It's a pleasure having you here and I think that it's always wonderful when we are in this environment to have this mix of ladies from across the continent. To start with, could you tell us more about the work that you are doing as head of division in this incredibly diverse portfolio that really deals with vulnerable groupings?
DR. ONGOLO	I will link this with my background; I consider myself a social development specialist and have worked in diverse areas on social development, from children's rights, human rights, governance, social protection, drugs, crime, you name it; so currently heading the Division of Social Welfare of Vulnerable Groups and Drug Control and Crime Prevention at the African Union Commission, my main role is to pursue social development policies related to inclusion, especially of the most vulnerable populations, and amongst the groups that we look at in this division includes persons with disabilities, older persons, people affected by female genital mutilation, people affected by child marriage, drug uses and also on the crime side, a little bit about the dynamics of organised crime.
DR. MALKA	And I would imagine in that entire mix that 50% of a minimum would be women that are affected by these incidents.
DR. ONGOLO	Absolutely, the majority affected are women, of course I am talking about child marriage who are married children and I consider, actually, child marriage the worst form of gender-based violence. When I look at FGM, it's women going through this, but even the topic that has brought me to the Pan African Parliament where I am today, online child sexual exploitation, really, more than 80% of children being violated at such a young age, are girls. But also, looking at drug abuse, understandably the majority are men, but the dynamics in terms of response; response looking at female specific issues completely lacking. You go across the continent, you will hardly find dedicated female rehabilitation centres and when females go into rehabilitation centres for drug use often they are still abused within those rehabilitation centres, so really, the challenges that women go through is enormous and you are a bit kind to talk of 50%, I would be thinking that what we need to address is more than 80% of problems that affect women.
DR. MALKA	And given that you are in the African Union and you are responsible for the development of policies; attending events like this, how do you take into consideration the different problems, well let's say the same problem but the

	different perspectives from various countries on the continent to account for them in your policies?
DR. ONGOLO	Yes, we do contextualise the policies quite a bit, but there are minimum standards that are not up for negotiation, regardless of the culture, regardless of the country; certain practices are simply not acceptable. When girls are not going to school because they have to be married, that will not be tolerated regardless of the culture, the religion, the context. But again, sometimes we have to weigh the level of development of a country, such that we do take into account in the policy implementation, step-wise implementation and working hand-by-hand in the countries where they are, to understand the culture and work from there...work inside out from their perspective rather than imposing and saying hey, hey, this is wrong and you must stop it now. We are working with them to understand why, really, we have to stop some of those practices.
DR. MALKA	One of the things that I've found in experience is that we can formulate policies, but the challenge often lies with implementation; how do we improve implementation of these, well to try to negate these very, very important issues that have such devastating consequences on the lives of women and children?
DR. ONGOLO	Indeed implementation is a challenge, I mean even looking at it globally, Africa we tend to domesticate, not domesticate but to really adopt and sign into a number of international conventions, but they are not ratified nationally and even when are ratified, they are not implemented. For example, I mentioned that we are addressing the challenges of online child sexual exploitation today and we do have a continental framework, not even a global, a continental framework on cyber-security, convention on cyber-security, adopted in 2014; as we are talking today, only 11 countries have ratified this convention.
DR. MALKA	And we are six years down the line.
DR. ONGOLO	We are six years down the line and this is really what forced us to go the extra mile; today we are discussing with parliamentarians across Africa responsible for different sub-committees like Human Rights, Justice and Social Development to go that extra mile and really work with the parliaments to make sure that this convention is ratified, is domesticated and appropriate resources are given for the implementation. The problem that we often face and see is that even where we ratify, things are side-lined, particularly if they are what we call "soft issues"; issues affecting women, issues affecting children, we tend to go with this policy called "mainstreaming"; in my view mainstreaming does not work. You mainstream a children's issue, a woman's issue into bigger ministries, it's just another way of saying forget it, we are not doing it and so one of the greatest push as Africans working for the African Commission, whereas mainstreaming might be important, but we are also talking about intersectionality and coordinated effort, integrated effort, where governments and the ministers deliver as one, rather than taking an issue in one ministry and expecting the ministry to mainstream it across the ministries.
DR. MALKA	That's an important dynamic because if you mainstream an issue it becomes a non-issue. Staying with women; globally around the world, women undertake most of the unpaid labour, which is essential to sustain households as well as economies, from cooking, cleaning, to child-rearing and even subsistence farming and according to the UN Women, women carry out two and a half times more unpaid labour or work longer hours so that they can incorporate paid as well as unpaid labour; how do you think we can promote a more equitable distribution of unpaid work between men and women?

<p>DR. ONGOLO</p>	<p>That's a tough one and indeed women bear the greatest burden, but you know what, as much as we need to focus on men, but my personal view is building the urgency of the women to take up that space to fight for themselves. I'm telling you, men will not let go unless the women, as an urgency within ourselves to take decisions to be able to do things and say no to certain aspects. For example, I will not understand if we have taken our girls to school, they are educated, they have undertaken training, they are working; I would not imagine that a man and a woman living in the same house have gone to work to do the same type of work, we come back at home and one goes to sleep, one works. So, for me the most effective equaliser is empowerment of women. Education and the correct education. Education, training, skills development, I mean lots of our women work in the formal economy where they are seriously underpaid or not paid at all, so that even if they had to make that decision to work in the informal economy, but that they are 100% responsible for this, they are working in the informal economy but getting the requisite income from the work that they are doing. So really, for me yes, we need to talk with men, we need to talk with our children, especially male children as we bring them up, but I do believe that the important aspect is giving the women empowerment and improving their urgency.</p>
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>And one of those dynamics or components to help with skills development is through education, it's a vital tool for empowering both individuals as well as societies. You have your doctorate in Business Administration and you have forged a number of different programmes in your life to focus on social development; for a moment, reflecting on yourself, can you share how education has impacted on your life and development?</p>
<p>DR. ONGOLO</p>	<p>Really without education I would be nowhere. I am a village girl, born and bred in the village, but back in the 70's when we went to primary school, formal education was kind of the same everywhere, so regardless of which part of the village you were in, if you worked hard you would be able to join a good secondary school. So, I left my rural village to go to secondary school 40 kilometres away from my home and I had to walk. I had to walk, carry my suitcase to a boarding school 40 kilometres away, but I could do this because my dad also believed in education. I can tell you that I was the first girl in the village to go to a secondary school and many people told my dad that you are wasting the eggs of this girl, she needs to get married. So, I have been many firsts; I was the first to go to secondary school from the village and I went with very, very good marks. While I was in this poor school in the village where no girl had ever gone to secondary school because of so many dynamics in the village, there was no really aspiration and we could not aspire to even select national schools, so whenever I attempted to select good schools, my teachers told me that girls will go nowhere, so then the school that I went to, which is 40 kilometres away was really a bad district school. I got in there and I told myself this is not the place for me because my ambition has always been to be a pilot, I said Jane look here, this school you are going nowhere. For almost two terms we were never taught maths, physics or chemistry. So, what did I do, and I always looked up to my dad and my mum; my dad, a villager, but someone who I think lived before his time, so one day what did I do? I had an inkling of some good schools that are probably like 60 kilometres away and I just liked them because I had seen them during district sports, the uniform that the girls wore were just so beautiful, I went to the directory and applied. This is, I am in form two, in this school that I did not like and the school that I needed to go to is actually</p>

	<p>called [Organda] Girls, I can even mention it by name, so I just wrote to that Mistress with my poor broken English from the village and I can even say what I wrote. I said; Dear Madam, this is a girl called Jane, I like your uniform, I like your uniform and I want to be in your school, but you know what, the teachers cheated me not to write to go to school, so I was called to this bad school and I want your school, please accept me. I was shocked that in less than one month that mistress had replied and said thank you so much for writing to us, we will make considerations by the end of third term. Third term, our last week in school, we are closing school, we are going home, I have not received any reply from this school and knowing that once I have gone home I will have no contact, I wrote again. I said Dear Madam, this is that girl who wrote to you, you said you will get back, you did not get back, we are closing school in one week, now what will I do? I cannot continue in this school, I must come to your school, please Madam help. I went home confident that I will be called, and I took everything; I carried everything of mine to go home. The last week of the school holidays I got a calling letter to go to [Organda] Girls, and I went to [Organda] Girls. It was tough! Firstly, I was so poor, secondly, considering that the school I was in, physics, chemistry and maths was hardly taught, I was completely behind. The head mistress called me to her office the day that I went, she said “you are a special case and we don’t do these things. The only condition you will stay in this school of mine, is for you to become number one to ten” and this was a school of three streams about 95 girls. I started at the bottom, I was put in Stream “C” and she told me if you don’t make it Stream “A”, you are out of my school. It was hard, I had to start taking notes, copying everything that the girls had done the previous year in form one. I was not sleeping at all, I used to work the whole night; I would put my feet in the water, in buckets so that I don’t fall asleep. Unfortunately, at the end of term one I was still in “C”. At the end of term two I was still in “C”, but whenever I went home my dad told me see the report is written “improved” so don’t worry, that mistress will not chase you. Second term I worked so, so hard, by third term I went to Stream “B”. Form three first time I was in Stream “A” and I finished in Stream “A” in form four and got very good grades to go to high school. So that’s why I am saying for me that education is the only equaliser, you have to believe in it and we have to encourage girls to really, really work hard and if you have a dream as a young girl, as a young person, please go for it, no-one should stop you because you are poor, because you are ugly, because you come from a rural community; it doesn’t matter.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Thank you for sharing such a wonderful story. This little person striving and struggling to make it in this big world, but the head mistress responding to you in such a way as to encourage you and motivate you to aspire and drive you on ahead.</p>
DR. ONGOLO	<p>In fact, that woman is my hero to date. When I went to that school in form two, as I mentioned we were really very poor, I didn’t even have the appropriate uniform. My previous school where I was in form one, we wore black school shoes, this new school wore brown shoes, I didn’t have, I couldn’t afford. I wore black for two terms until a good Samaritan bought for me brown shoes.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And look where you are today, living proof of the value of education. Recently there’s been a wave of different movements and very notable in South Africa with Me Too; Time’s Up; Am I Next and they all have been movements about gender-based violence, which is unfortunately not a problem unique to one country, but it’s a pandemic that affects all of us as a society. One of the negatives of this campaign seems to be impacting though on the opportunities for women as a</p>

	result of men not wanting to be implicated in any wrongdoing, from working with women, which obviously jeopardises hiring opportunities, working relationships; what are your thoughts about this?
DR. ONGOLO	My thoughts are that there could be valid reasons for fear for men pulling back and this is why we need to work jointly to empower men as much as we empower women, but at the same time I think as women, as leaders, we need to push for clarity of roles, very clear policies so that those spaces are protected and when there is clarity it's black and white, what is affirmative action, this black and white, what is sexual violence at the workplace, what does it mean; what does it mean if it happens, what are the remedies. I think those are really very important procedures to take on board and if we do that, we are protecting the women, but we are also protecting the well-meaning men who are our allies.
DR. MALKA	Very valid points.
DR. MALKA	You are listening to 'Womankind – Women in Unity' on Channel Africa, the African Perspective and today we are talking to Dr. Jane Marie Ongolo at the Pan African Parliament and she is from the African Union Commission.
DR. MALKA	Dr. Ongolo, our programme 'Womankind – Women in Unity' is all about gender equality which is increasingly a global focus; taking into consideration the various challenges as well as the successes that women's legal rights have had over the last few years, do you think that in reality we will get to a point of 50/50 representation?
DR. ONGOLO	I am confident we will do that. For example, the African Union Commission where I work, really works towards that and the AU Commission has so, so many departments. One of the departments, actually the department I work for, the Department of Social Affairs, has achieved that parity in senior management and so some of the mechanisms and without really wanting to say that women are less intelligent, less skilled, but what the Commission has really tried to do, affirmative action, for example where you know priority is given; if we have a man and a woman who are equally good, priority will be given to a woman and that has really helped to achieve that priority and while we have small gains like in the department that I work for, I think these are good stories that we need to tell everyone and to encourage everyone using these. Unfortunately we are over-represented in social development and social affairs, much less in the technical fields and we need to put a lot of emphasis in the technical fields as well because women are as good as men, even with the technical issues.
DR. MALKA	You have cited affirmative action as being one area and way of trying to address the dynamic; what are your views though on things like legislation or quotas as trying to shift that gender balance?
DR. ONGOLO	I do believe in legislation and quotas also as one of the mechanisms for really implementing affirmative action. So I believe in initial legislation to support quotas to achieve parity; once parity has been achieved probably then, you know, we can do away with that because we don't want to sit up there also and people making us feel that you are here just because of the quota, while indeed women are there for really who they are. So it's important that we use these mechanisms to achieve parity and then once the field has been levelled, you know, we have been asked for these quotas because the field is not level, the playing field is not level for God's sake, you know, let's just look at a typical family where you have a boy and a girl; the boy will be studying, the girl will be working, even assisting the parents with...if the parent is working in the informal sector, the girl will be assisting in the shop, in the wherever. Boys will be doing homework, girls will be cooking, but also the sexual abuse that impacts girls much more than boys. We have issues of

	<p>even teenager pregnancy where when a teenage girl is pregnant will be sent away from school, the boy responsible will continue with school, assuming they are all teenagers, will continue with school, so by the time you know the girl picks up and gets there, things have moved. So, we are asking for these measures just because the field is not level, otherwise if it was, we would not need those measures at all.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And you've reminded me of two things; one, we had an interview with the Foreign Affairs Minister of Jamaica and she was talking about the issue of teen pregnancies and she said "it's always been a moral point and it's always the girls fault" and she said what they tried to do in Jamaica and managed to succeed was changing it to one of an economic argument by saying if you send these girls away from school they are going to become a burden on the state, they have produced a child who is going to be a burden on the state; the chances of them falling pregnant again is a much, much higher incidence. So bring these girls back into school, allow them to have that second chance and to go and be effective in Society and then the thing was, I was looking at the World Economic Forum on gender gaps; in 2017 the two clear gaps that we have is between business and politics and they estimated then that it would take 217 years to close the gap, from a business and economic point of view; 99 years to close the gap from a political point of view. When I looked at the 2020 figures, the 217 years has increased to 247; the 99 years for politics has decreased to 95; you and I won't be around by the time gender parity is reached.</p>
DR. ONGOLO	<p>The figures are actually shocking and for me this should be a wake-up call that we have to be running at...we have to be sprinting at a hundred metres and really not doing long-distance races. It's an emergency and I agree with the point that you say we have to position this from different aspects, the fact that women are lagging behind contributes to poverty, and the poverty cycle continues. When we say that when you educate a woman you educate an entire family and a nation, you know, but if you educate a boy it's one person, so some of these arguments should really help us to push the agenda and the debate has to be central at the family level, it has to start with the family so that empowerment begins from the time children are born, we can't wait to start achieving and changing things as people grow. So, if as we give birth, we give birth to boys, we give birth to children with equal opportunities being given from that point on. So as the young people grow up, then they grow up knowing that they are equal, I mean I know there's no single bullet that can fix this, but really starting at the family level is very, very important for me.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And you are right about family and you are right about so many components and I think back to looking at traditional cultures in the continent, that we have got a pervasiveness of patriarchy, we have got strong traditions which often hold women back. You have just expanded on that wonderful story of you coming from a village, managing to succeed as a young girl, to where you are today; can you share with us in your life what barriers and challenges, from a gender perspective, that you've managed to overcome?</p>
DR. ONGOLO	<p>Quite a lot of, quite a lot, starting from the time I was in primary school. I think I knew my rights from the time I was really very young and I am a very gentle woman now but when I was a child I was kind of wild, I was a fighter, and that's what helped me. I have fought all my life and you can imagine that boys really used to harass us in school and in my wildness I could fight them like crazy and each time we fought and I beat the boys and I could beat them thoroughly, I am the one who was always being caned and it saddened me, it's something that I still remember, I am bitter about it, I was always being caned in the parade in front of everyone for fighting, but I was</p>

	<p>protecting my space. I was protecting my space and several attempts were made even at that early age to sexual assault, but being a fighter, you know, naturally a fighter I had to address this, I had to deal with this. So for me, much more, I have experienced it much more growing up in school and in the community, as I said, where girls did not go to school, so the community thought I was abnormal and they didn't accept me, they thought that I was abnormal, that my eggs are dying in my womb and those type of things and they used to tell my dad that you have a boy, you don't have a girl. So for a long time actually I believed I was abnormal and that helped me, because I believed I was abnormal, that I didn't have girly feelings and whatnot, so I grew up feeling like that and behaving like a boy, unfortunately, so behaving like a boy protected me from a lot of the abuses that girls often experience and my growth was also, I won't say stunted, but I think I was developing very slowly because at 16 my boobs were barely coming out at 16 so most of the times I was flat and looked like a boy, like a man so to speak, and even to date many people tell me that I look more like a man than a woman. So, yes but at the workplace probably not, maybe wild side has protected me from any forms of discrimination at the workplace, but I experienced it more in the village in the community and growing up.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>So, you really worked on establishing your identity of owning your space. Given your experiences and the world that we live in today, what would be your advice to younger women experiencing similar challenges to what you had?</p>
DR. ONGOLO	<p>Don't give up. Develop a dream and keep on dreaming and go for it and interestingly the boys, or I don't want to demonise the boys, all of them, but the perpetrators, people who bring you down, they are not as strong as you think. The moment you fight back and tell them NO, you would be surprised at how fast they leave you alone and you will be called all sorts of names, don't mind them, as long as you know what you want, go for it young girls.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Wonderful words of advice. Now we're coming towards the end of the show and one question that I ask all my guests who have made tremendous achievements in their respective disciplines is about some of the factors that they consider have contributed to their success. Some people speak about hard work, determination, perseverance, particular people in their life; can you tell us some of your factors of success?</p>
DR. ONGOLO	<p>Well all those you have said, perseverance, hard work, but significantly if you have people who believe in you. My dad believed in me a hundred percent and that kept me going, my mum believed in me a hundred percent and it kept me going, but when I reflect back, unfortunately because being a go-getter was seen to be a boy thing or a man thing, so because I was a go-getter my dad always called me "my boy". So, well I don't think it's a good thing but somehow that propelled me, and I have always had wonderful, wonderful women role models, really, I believe in women role models. The school that I went to that I have just explained about, my head mistress, she is called Mrs. Odongo, I adore her to pieces and I think all girls who have passed through her hands they have just loved her. She mentored us, protected us, treated each of us girls in the school like you are an individual; that meant so, so, so, so much and some of the things that we experienced then, the children of nowadays don't experience. We had one-on-one with our teachers all the time and we were given all forms of...how they call them skills...soft skills, soft skills to be able to manage our circumstances, so that's the second person. My dad the first, my dad and mum first, second person my headmistress, thirdly, several groups of women that I have seen and I aspired to, a lady called [Mary Mbaao], looking at them, the things they were doing, I just loved and I always wanted to be them. What has worked for me</p>

	is when I identify the people that I like, then I work towards being them. The last one is my husband, I got married fairly early at 25, but he is someone who believes in me a hundred percent, does not hold me back, really for him as long as I am happy it doesn't matter whether I go to live in the South Pole or the North Pole, he lives in Kenya, I live in Addis Ababa, but we meet frequently and regularly, but that space for me just to be is the most important and as we get into relationships or different associations it is important to try to find someone who understands you not matter how complicated you are, who understands you, who believes your dream and that has helped me.
DR. MALKA	Thank you for sharing such a deep insight into the dynamics and the factors that have helped you get to be the person you are today. And lastly, as we close out the conversation, can you please share a few words of wisdom or inspiration for girls and women living on the continent today?
DR. ONGOLO	Ah it's difficult. Firstly that...and it's a quote from the bible, "you are fearfully and wonderfully made" let no-one tell you otherwise. So being fearfully and wonderfully made be who you are, exploit your full potential, one never arrives until we die. Every day look for a new challenge and go for it.
DR. MALKA	Wonderful words of inspiration, thank you so much for joining us today.
DR. ONGOLO	Thank you so, so much, I enjoyed being in your show and I hope that whatever little that we have shared might lift one girl, if not many, thank you very much.
DR. MALKA	It's been a pleasure having you on the air today.
PROGRAMME END	