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PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: MS BARBARA CREECY – MINISTER OF FORESTRY AND FISHERIES AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

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 South Africa's Minister of Forestry and Fisheries and Environmental Affairs, Barbara Creecy. She previously served in the Provincial Legislature, joining in 1994, in various portfolios, being MEC for Sports, Recreation, Arts and Culture, MEC for Education and MEC for Finance. Welcome to the show Minister!
MINISTER CREECY	Good morning and thank you very much for inviting me.
DR. MALKA	Minister to begin with, the Department's vision is for a prosperous and equitable society, living in harmony with our natural resources. You have got various branches that deal with ocean and coast, climate change, biodiversity, conservation, chemicals, waste management, forestry management and fisheries management; it's an enormous portfolio.
MINISTER CREECY	It's huge but very exciting because I think it's on the cutting-edge of many of the major issues of our time. The issue of sustainability, of climate change, of biodiversity loss, so it's enormously interesting and exciting.
DR. MALKA	And as I was reading through the different branches, it struck me that we almost take these elements for granted as a human race, that all of these things are taken care of, that we're just going to have a wonderful climate, but real effort has to be taken in order to make it sustainable.
MINISTER CREECY	Well I suppose that what we're all confronting across the world is that unless we change the way in which we live and work and exploit the natural resource space that we have been given on this wonderful planet of ours, human life as we know it today is not sustainable and I suppose that on the one hand many people, including myself, when one first came to understand what lies ahead of us in terms of the impacts of climate change and what can happen if we don't deal with biodiversity loss, it's a gloomy picture and a very scary picture and I think that from the perspective of many scientists, the current pandemic that we are experiencing is a..it's a Zoonotic disease which means it's a disease that has jumped from animals to human beings and there would be many people who would argue that it has happened because our relationship with the animal world is not an appropriate or a sustainable one. So yes, on the one hand I think that there can be a temptation when you come to understand these issues, that you're filled with doom and gloom, but I think that there are also as I say, enormous opportunities here, particularly in the current situation that we're in because across the world and our own country and our own continent are included in this, there's a recognition that as we reconstruct and recover from the pandemic, we have to deal with some of the abiding constraints that exist in our society and we have to deal with some of the ways in which we are exploiting resources that are not sustainable and I think that when you're at a moment of reset, it's also a moment of hope and a moment of opportunity.

DR. MALKA	Given that context that you've just outlined for us, can you tell us about some of the more significant programmes in the department?
MINISTER CREECY	Well this year there are two very important events happening in the world. So the first is the Climate Conference that will be taking place in Glasgow in November and this year is the first year when the Paris Accord has come fully into effect. This is an international agreement where all countries agree to contribute to mitigating and overcoming the impacts of climate change, adapting to them as they're reflecting their countries and raising the means of implementation to do this. It's also the year of the Biodiversity COP which is due to take place in Kunming in China in mid-year and this is the year in which we need to be looking at how we prevent mass extinction of species, how we ensure that there is greater equity in the way in which communities benefit from biodiversity and also how we ensure that there is recognition for indigenous knowledge systems that are dependent on biodiversity and which are currently earning big bucks for large pharmaceutical companies, the beauty industry and so on. So these I think are two very important events this year and these two events are shaping the priorities of the department and they are also obviously shaping the priorities of our continent and our world when it comes to environmental issues and you would understand that if you are dealing with an issue such as biodiversity or climate change, it will impact on all areas of our branch. The way we manage waste can contribute to biodiversity loss, it can contribute to climate change or it can help us to reverse it. The way in which we manage our oceans will depend on whether we have food security in the future and will also depend on the extent to which we are enabling the oceans to play a very important role in mitigating climate change. So these things are all linked and that's why I think these are the two big events that are happening this year and are shaping our priorities.
DR. MALKA	With the inter-linkages, clearly climate issues are not bound to one particular geography; what we do in our environment, what another country does in their environment have all got a compounding effect, so with that view, how does the rest of the continent feature in terms of the plans that you've undertaken and are there any key projects that you can share with us?
MINISTER CREECY	I have the privilege at the moment of being the president of a continental forum called the African Minister's of the Environment (AMCEN) and last year we met and we discussed the impact of the pandemic on our countries and we discussed this very important issue that I was talking about earlier as to how do we use the recovery process from the pandemic to reset our approaches to both economy and to society and in this context we developed something called the African Green Stimulus Recovery Programme that identifies twelve different areas where African countries can work to put their economies and their societies on a more sustainable development path and I think that this is an important issue that we will be taking shortly to [CAHOSK]; [CAHOSK] is the body that falls under the African Union that is responsible for coordinating climate change and other environmental issues. So we do want the African Union to be recognising this document and to be helping us to implement it in all aspects of economic and social recovery from the pandemic.
DR. MALKA	And Minister from a departmental point of view, because our programme is obviously a strong focus on women, can you tell us if there are any core programmes or initiatives that relate women in the portfolio?
MINISTER CREECY	Well obviously first of all our department, through it's different branches and entities, is the largest employer of scientists in the country and we have

	<p>a programme that does outreach in schools, it starts with enhancing scientific education in the life sciences in particular, in schools, it has an enrichment component, so we would be encouraging children to visit our protected areas, our national parks, our biological gardens, but ultimately it's also a programme that offers bursaries and scholarships to young people who would be going to university and of course we have a policy that half of those scholarships must go to young women. You would understand that sciences are often not an area that women choose first and foremost to study, so that is why these outreach programmes and enrichment programmes are very important because we want to encourage girls and young women to consider sciences as a choice of study and ultimately as a choice of career and of course from these bursaries we would then be offering placements in the department so that young people can get that work experience and once again there would be a...an extra effort would go into making sure that from the graduates, half of those who come into those internship programmes are women. Of course one of the things that I have come to understand since being in this department is that we are working in rural areas in our country where there are often no other government facilities other than our own facilities and perhaps those of rural development and agriculture. We have a very, very large public employment programme, on average we are employing between 30 and 50 thousand people a year in those public employment opportunities and our primary target there are women and young people. So I think that women benefit twice, firstly as young people and secondly as women and obviously these programmes involve restoration of ecosystem services, so restoration of wetlands, estuaries, beaches, dunes, but also involve removal of alien species and so we have a very big programme Working for Water and another programme Working for Fire where we are doing preventive maintenance in our forest estates to build fire breaks and so on and what we find is that women are very grateful for this opportunity to put food on the table. We've recently introduced enrichment in these programmes, so one of the things that we've done is a whole lot of public education around Covid but more recently we have been doing work around the whole question of gender based violence, because many of these women would be in very vulnerable settings because they have no alternative livelihoods and they have very often no alternatives to where they are currently living. So clearly they would be in situations where they would be facing abuse and we want to raise awareness that they don't have to suffer in silence, that they can report this abuse, they can do something about it, so I think that this important work we're doing with groups of people who might otherwise not have access to this kind of education and understanding.</p>
DR. MALKA	Thank you very much for giving us the overview of the department in this phase of the conversation as well as the efforts underway to get that throughput of scientists and young people coming into the department and the output on employment.
AD BREAK	
DR. MALKA	Today we're talking to Minister Barbara Creecy who is South Africa's Minister of Forestry and Fisheries, as well as Environmental Affairs.
DR. MALKA	Turning towards let's say your previous life, when you were serving as MECs in the Gauteng Legislature; you've won several awards for programmes that you had initiated, be it for example in the Department of Education for Gauteng a turnaround strategy which improved matric performance in 400 underperforming township schools, which received the first prize award from the United Nations with respect to improving delivery of public services, when

	<p>you served as MEC of Finance, the Provincial Treasury implemented the Open Tender System and through this as well as other initiatives the Treasury in turn was recognised as pioneers in financial management in the public sector, winning Batho Pele awards as well as the Premier’s Service Excellence Awards. Could you tell us a little bit about one or two of these programmes behind the awards?</p>
<p>MINISTER CREECY</p>	<p>Well I think that my favourite programme remains the work that we did in the Gauteng Department of Education, the matric improvement programme and when I became MEC for Education, the Soweto area in particular, but in fact all schools in the major urban concentrations in Gauteng, African communities, were severely underperforming and I think at that time the pass rate in many of those schools wasn’t even 50% and there was a very, very high dropout rate. Now, if in our country you don’t get something as basic as a matric certificate, it really means that because of our high rates of poverty and inequality and unemployment, you actually have absolutely no chance of further education and training and also very, very limited, if no chance, of employment and I think that because we recognised the importance of that piece of paper and we recognised the importance of making sure that young people stayed in school and wrote the matric exam, we developed this programme to enhance their ability to participate in those exams and there were camps and extra classes on weekends and after school hours, but there was also other forms of social support programmes that we introduced to combat gangsterism, programmes to combat bullying as well as, you know, the very simple programme that I think has also won much acclaim, this programme of introducing free sanitary towels for girls in schools, because one of the things we know is that this is a major reason why young women miss school and it’s a major reason that contributes to dropout. I think we also had programmes, I wasn’t very popular with some of my officials because I absolutely insisted, you know, the laws allows young women who are pregnant to continue with their schooling and it also allows them to return to school once they have they completed their schooling and I thought that that was very important because once young women fall out of the schooling system as a result of premature motherhood, they are very unlikely ever to resume their education and then that means that forever, you know, they are at the bottom of the heap. So this was a programme that I remain passionate about and I know that Gauteng has continued to improve their matric results and I think it was wonderful news to see that five of the Gauteng Departments remained the top performing areas in the country. So I think that yes, that’s just one programme that I can share with you and I think it relates to the issue that we were speaking about earlier which is how do you give girls and young women a better chance in life.</p>
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>It sounds like a fantastically rewarding programme and it’s wonderful to see that it has continued with its actions and this speaks to me on everything that you’re saying, you’ve got an extraordinary empathy in terms of doing things and doing things for public good and public service and in saying that, you’ve served your country since before the dawn of our democracy; can you share a few moments that have been memorable in your career thus far and when you understood that politics would be a significant part of your life?</p>
<p>MINISTER CREECY</p>	<p>You know I had the privilege of growing up in a family where my parents were politically aware people and my father died when I was a young child, I was only eight years old, but my mother was I mean I think first of all my mother was for me a role player of somebody who there was nothing she</p>

	<p>couldn't do, she earned money, she worked, she looked after the family and I think that she really set that example for me as a very young child that women can do anything, but she was also a very politically aware person and she brought us up to believe that apartheid was wrong. I was very aware as a child that we had very different political views as a family from other people that I went to school with and other families that we knew and it was always a distinguishing feature from my mother that we don't believe that this is right and we're opposed to it and I think that, you know, from a very early age I can remember, I mean I grew up in the 1960s when there were forced removals, there were terrible pass raids and I can remember those things as a child and I can remember a very, very strong feeling that this was wrong and as I grew up and I went to Wits University, my first year at university was 1976 and Wits students protested against the killing of Hector Peterson on the 16th of June 1976 and as they say, the rest is history, that was how I became actively involved in anti-apartheid politics as a young person. I suppose one memory that really stays in my mind was after a decision had been taken by the De Klerk regime to unban the ANC and a decision was taken to release Nelson Mandela, I can remember it was the Sunday morning when Nelson Mandela was due to be released from Pollsmoor prison and I can remember being woken up very early in the morning, I lived in a flat in Berea at that stage, by young people spontaneously running up and down the street at six o'clock in the morning screaming "he's free, he's free" and it remains just this incredibly evocative memory of the incredible symbolism that the father of our democracy, the grandfather of our democracy has for all of us and this spontaneous joy of those days after he was released. And you know when you go through the times that we're going through now, very, very hard times, times when there is no...a lot of people feel that there is very little hope, people are grieving loss, we are confronted daily by commissions of enquiry that talk about things that have gone terribly wrong in our government; for me it's very important to hold onto those moments of hope and those memories of what this was all about, because while one does not want to deny what has gone wrong, I think that the fundamental values and the fundamental struggle to build a better South Africa, a more equal South Africa, a South Africa where the colour of your skin and the place where you're born does not determine what you can become in your life. I think that those values remain valid and we must hold onto those values and we must continue to struggle for those values, because if we don't, then I think that life runs the danger of becoming meaningless.</p>
DR. MALKA	It's such an important message Minister Creecy.
	AD BREAK
DR. MALKA	Today we're talking to Minister Barbara Creecy who is South Africa's Minister of Forestry and Fisheries, as well as Environmental Affairs.
DR. MALKA	Minister, turning towards more of a personal perspective and a gender focus; our show is all about celebrating women and the 8 th of March is a point where women around the world celebrate International Women's Day. The theme of this year is very pertinent; Women in leadership; achieving an equal future in a Covid-19 world. Given your perspective as a female leader, what areas do you think we need to build on the most to help benefit women in the future?
MINISTER CREECY	Well obviously health and education remain very important priorities in our society. Education because it's the one thing nobody can ever take away from you, it is yours forever and health because I think we understand that women always carry the burden of raising families, of supporting families both physically and emotionally and we understand

	<p>that in the time of the pandemic, those roles become intensified, so when children can't go to school, women have to step into that space. When family members are sick, its women who will have to do the caring. When incomes are lost, it's women who must stretch the food and keep everybody going under very, very difficult circumstances and I think that on International Women's Day we have to salute the tenacity of women in our country who are and across the globe, who are daily struggling with these realities and under very, very difficult circumstances are managing to keep themselves and their families afloat and I think that we...it's important just to pause for a moment and to celebrate the triumph of those individual human spirits, because it's those individual human spirits that collectively are getting all of us through what we're going through at the moment.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And if you had a major crystal ball and could look into the future, how do you think gender equality will look in South Africa in say ten/twenty years time?</p>
MINISTER CREECY	<p>Well I hope that in ten or twenty years time there will be greater gender equality for all women. I think that what we have seen in my own lifetime is middle class women managing to achieve a level of self-realisation and actualisation that I never thought would be possible in my own lifetime when I was young, but I think that what we recognise is that women who are living under conditions of poverty and women who are living in working class communities, whether in urban or rural areas, are still carrying a disproportionate burden and are still prevented by patriarchy in our society from fully achieving their own aspirations and I would like to see a society that becomes more equal for all men and women, but also a society where women, regardless of their class background, achieve a better ability to realise their own potential and to achieve their dreams.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Minister, a question I'd like to ask you now is about your personal journey and some of your factors of success. Some people have spoken in the past on this show about discipline, focus, faith and values; in your opinion, what would you say have been some of your key drivers?</p>
MINISTER CREECY	<p>Yes, I would say those things, discipline, focus, faith, values yes, all of those things. I suppose my commitment to the anti-apartheid struggle and my commitment to building a democratic South Africa and a fair and equal South Africa remains the primary motivating force for me and I think that yes, I mean I'm like all other women who work and who've had families, you know, obviously my children are grown up now but I've had those struggles, I've been without sleep, I've got up at three o'clock in the morning to study because I wanted further education, so all of those issues of juggling, I think, are issues that all women share and all women confront, but I think you know for me what's really important is to keep that focus on why you do what you do and to find a way to reenergise yourself. I spoke to you about the work that I did when I was in the Department of Education and one of the wonderful things about being in the Department of Education is when you feel absolutely exhausted and depressed because things are not working as you would want them to work, you can go to a school and you can talk to young people and when you do that you realise why it is that you are doing what you are doing and I think that that's something I learned in that job and it's something that I continue to do in my current job, is to find a way to go to communities, to go to young people, to go to situations where people are struggling with their daily lives and just to talk to them about their experiences and that gives me the emotional energy to go on, because it helps me to remember why with all the, you know, in my position you can get caught up in what I call 'palace politics' and its ugly, but I think what is important is to go back</p>

	to the people that you are working for and that you're working with so that you remember why you're doing it.
DR. MALKA	And lastly, as we close out our conversation today in honour of International Women's Day and let's say as we like to do in South Africa, create a month on celebrating women, please can you share a few words of wisdom to women and girls that are listening to us on the continent?
MINISTER CREECY	Well I think that what is really important is first of all to have dreams and to have a deep belief that those dreams that you have are valid and to go out consciously and actively to pursue those dreams that you have. Along the way you are going to encounter enormous difficulty and sometimes those dreams will be much further away than on other days. The only advice I can give is never, never, never give up. However hard it is, however dark it is, eventually the dawn will come. Don't give up, your dreams are valid, your dreams are special to you and you have a right to realise them as a human being.
DR. MALKA	Thank you very much for that powerful message.
MINISTER CREECY	Thank you very much.
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