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PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: MP HELOISE DENNER – FREEDOM FRONT PLUS – PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR

SPEAKER	TRANSCRIPTION
DR. MALKA	Hello, I'm Dr. Amaleya Goneos-Malka, welcome to 'Womanity– Women in Unity'. The show that celebrates prominent and ordinary African Women's milestone achievements in their struggles for liberation, self-emancipation, human rights, democracy, racism, socio-economic class division and gender based violence.
DR. MALKA	Joining us on the line today is Ms. Heloise Denner from the Freedom Front Plus, who serves as a member of parliament, she sits on the Portfolio Committee for Employment and Labour and she joins us today in our series covering perspectives from women across different political parties in the country. Welcome to the show!
MP DENNER	<b>Thank you Dr. Malka, it's a privilege to be on the show, especially with that intro, it's quite a privilege to hear that and ya, I would, ya I would welcome to be able to speak to you and to your listeners.</b>
DR. MALKA	To start with, in South Africa we've got fourteen different political parties, which is quite a significant number, and the effects of this is that it contributes to our country's multi-party democracy and diversity. You are a member of the Portfolio Committee of Employment and Labour; can you please share with us some of the responsibilities that come with being a member of parliament and then just to go into more detail on the priority or focal points of the portfolio committee that you participate in?
MP DENNER	<b>Yes, I think the greatest responsibility we have as members of parliament is firstly our oversight responsibility and then also, equally important but secondly, is being able and in a position to make a difference right where we are when we are there. I can just shortly name an example; our oversight role should not be interpreted lightly, we have the responsibility to see to it that government departments are held accountable, which is not always very easy, but we try to do it to the best of our abilities and there are many facets to this role, but keeping abreast of government policies, their duties, their progress, their spending, their targets, the plans that are set for government departments and the implementation thereof and basically overseeing whether or not they are functioning to the advantage of all South Africans, is quite an important responsibility that should not be taken lightly. And what I mean with making a difference right where we are, is that we are in a very fortunate position to be able to, and I think I should mention there, I think the lines are a bit blurred between the legislature and government, which is actually to the advantage of everyone, because we are in the position to, through our interpersonal relationships that we have and that we build through time which is also our responsibility to build, with government officials, people in the minister's office for instance, the deputy minister's office for instance and then the different entities, we can make a difference for people, for example when we get queries and problems we can refer it to these people whom we've built relationships with. I can name as an example, you would know that last year with the Covid-19 pandemic the lockdown in South Africa started in March and as a measure...a counter measure to the devastating effect that the lockdown and the pandemic had on the economy, the Department of Labour instituted a temporary employment relief scheme, the TERS Fund, which basically paid a certain percentage of salaries to employees who did not work in essential services, who actually had to sit home, who</b>

	<p>did not get an income, so the TERS Fund paid out to those employees, but there were many problems with the TERS Fund and many of those problems were referred to members of parliament, like myself, like many of my colleagues and we were able to escalate those problems to the Department, to officials that we've built relationships with and it may sound small, but we were able to make a difference to many people who did not get any income at all. So through our roles as MPs and the relationships that we've built we were able to make a difference and I think that is as important as our oversight role as well and you asked about the Portfolio Committee; I'm a member of the Portfolio Committee on Labour and Employment, as I've mentioned, which has six entities under it, but the most important of those entities is probably the Unemployment Insurance Fund, the Compensation Fund which looks after workers that have been injured on duty and then the Inspection and Enforcement Services who's role is to ensure that labour legislation is adhered to by businesses, by private sector and public sector employers.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>You spoke about the impact of not just oversight, but being able to bring about change and particularly highlighting TERS and Covid-19; often the machinery in government takes a long time to turn and when we think of how Covid was a year ago now, but how fast people had to react, because a person's salary is something which comes on a monthly basis, if you don't have a salary you're not going to be able to finance this month or the next, so being able to be so responsive so quickly really introduced a dramatic change which really helped people.</p>
MP DENNER	<p>Yes, yes, I think we should give credit where credit is due definitely and I think the TERS Fund made an immeasurable difference in many people's lives, I think they paid out almost sixty billion rand, if I remember correctly off the top of my head, and together with its glitches and problems and mistakes, they still made a huge difference to many people's lives and that should be commended, I think government really did something extraordinary there.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And how would you say that life has changed for an MP in parliament with regards to the ways of working in the era of Covid-19?</p>
MP DENNER	<p>Well to be honest, I think life with regards to our work has been made easier, if I can speak from personal experience; parliament physically takes place in Cape Town, but many of our members are not based in Cape Town. I, for instance, am based in Bloemfontein in the Free State which is about a thousand kilometres away from Cape Town, so I usually commute to Cape Town every week, I leave on a Monday evening and I return on a Friday morning and now that we are doing everything on virtual platforms, the commuting is less, so we save time and we save tax payers money, also, I'm not complaining, I am able to be home quite a lot. I recently got married so I still like my husband and I still like his company (that's a joke) but yes, I enjoy being home more and I think we can be, in a way we are more sufficient because we are working virtually, we're able to do more oversight and more in-depth work because we have more time at our disposal and some of our committee meetings have been scheduled for six o'clock on a Friday evening for instance, so we definitely can do more. I know it's had a devastating effect on many people and many people's livelihoods and jobs and family life, but that definitely is an advantage that we have now, that we don't have to be in Cape Town physically.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And listening to what you're saying and it's also some of the experiences from other guests who've been on the programme, that I almost think that in some ways, having gone through this experience, it provides a way where we can reset agendas, we can fix things that weren't working and adjust to a different type of schedule or working arrangement.</p>

MP DENNER	Yes, most definitely, that as well, but I also think that Covid has highlighted many other problems that we've always had but we've never focused on, which also needs our focus. So I think the fact that Covid has shone a light on many social ills and things that we have to focus on, that's very good and then also, as you say, we need to change and adapt to changing times and I think through everything we've come out the other side, ya, quite well.
<b>AD BREAK</b>	
DR. MALKA	Today we're talking to Member of Parliament, Heloise Denner, from the Freedom Front Plus; we would love to receive your comments on Twitter:@WomanityTalk.
DR. MALKA	Turning towards the portfolio committee that you represent, being the Department of Employment and Labour; their activities play a significant role in reducing unemployment, poverty and inequality through various programmes and policies and ultimately they're aimed at improving economic efficiency and productivity, creating employment, eliminating inequality and discretion in the workplace; to what extent do you think that we as a country are progressing in these target areas?
MP DENNER	<b>Well unfortunately I must say that I'm not too positive about the Department of Labour's outcomes with regards to specifically employment creation. We have the highest unemployment rate of I think it's 32.5% at the moment, that South Africa has seen since the start of the quarterly Labour Force Survey, which is the tool that is utilised by Statistics South Africa to measure unemployment in South Africa and the mandate of the Department of Labour was expanded with the start of the sixth parliament in 2019 to include employment creation, but to date, I must say we have not seen any significant progress by the department in this field. We have many policies and a lot of legislation is aimed at eliminating inequality in the workplace, be it racial inequality, gender inequality or discrimination against people with disabilities, either intentional or unintentional, but these policies and legislation don't seem to have the effect of the intention with which it was written, so I am of the opinion that the reason for this can be summed up in the state of the South African economy and the way that the private sector is being treated by government, especially and I can say this with authority because I'm on the Portfolio Committee for Labour and Employment, I think the entire government may be guilty of this in a certain way, but especially the Department of Employment of Labour. The private sector is the greatest employment creator in the country, but unfortunately it's made the scapegoat for every failed labour policy and legislation, on the other hand, if the private sector is stimulated, promoted and supported by government, it would be able to grow the economy and if the economy flourishes jobs will be created, opportunities will be created and which will in turn see to it that inequality, be it gender or income, etcetera, would be eliminated at the end of the day.</b>
DR. MALKA	And when you're talking about business in private sector, I did some research recently which indicated that small business accounts for 20% of total turnover in South Africa; in 2019 this, our gross turnover as a country was valued at R10.3 trillion, large businesses accounting for 68%, medium businesses 10% and small businesses contributing 22% or R2.3 trillion and in the first quarter of 2019 there were 2.5 million SMME's registered. So even if that is, which we know is not true, one individual per SMME, that's 2.5 million people that are employed in this sector, so as you say, it is the private sector that grows the economy.
MP DENNER	<b>Correct, correct, absolutely and you must remember, if one person is employed by an SMME for instance, that person maybe has a wife at home or a husband at home who has children, so effectively, four or five, six, ten people could be linked to that one person's employment and I think the</b>

	<b>amount of red tape and the bureaucracy that we currently have that are stumbling blocks in the way of small businesses, medium businesses, even large businesses, negatively impacts on those businesses and ultimately on employment creation and the economy, so if the private sector isn't supported and stimulated, then we will never be able to eradicate unemployment in South Africa.</b>
DR. MALKA	I know that we won't be able to provide solutions or solve these ills in our conversation today, so, turning towards the, let's say the focus of this series, which is about representation from different political parties; you are part of the Freedom Front Plus and according to the manifesto for the party, it supports women's rights but knows that these rights can only be exercised in practice if women are empowered by means of training and the creation of equal opportunities. You have a legal background with a BCom in law and other qualifications; please tell us about some of the Freedom Front Plus's policies in relation to women.
<b>MYeP DENNER</b>	<b>Yes, well first and foremost our party believes that women should not be reduced to quotas, we've had a short discussion about quotas, as currently South African legislation purports, unfortunately. If women have adequate access to opportunities to education and to employment, this will ultimately empower women, so basically, actual opportunities must be promoted and not an artificial system of empowerment which we have set out in our manifesto as well, we must strive for equal opportunities and not equal outcomes and that's, in short, what our policies with regards to women entail.</b>
DR. MALKA	And how do you see female empowerment actually materialising in practice, because it's one thing to talk about quotas, it's another thing to say that we've got policies, which we have an abundance of, as we've just mentioned, but how can we make it real and practical for women on the ground?
<b>MP DENNER</b>	<b>Yes, you mentioned that we have an abundance of policies and that's absolutely true and I think earlier I mentioned that we have so many policies and legislation, but it seems that we just can't get to where the writers of those policies and legislation aimed those policies to be. I think that female empowerment, practically, on the ground, is in the hands of women like me, like you, like other female leaders and role players that you've interviewed on this show before me, like the female shop clerk, the pre-school teacher, the lawyer, the hairdresser, mechanic, housewife, mothers; we as women need to support each other in the workplace and I think we have to take up the responsibility to be role models to young girls to empower them and to be the change we want to see. Without getting too philosophical, I think the support that women have for other women and empowering them to get to a point where there is true equality, is the most important and practical thing that we can do on the ground.</b>
DR. MALKA	I also think that changing, and it goes back to that word policy again, but being able to change systems stems from roles in politics, that that is one of the driving forces to create change; so from a party point of view, to what extent are women represented on the party, is it a 50/50 structure or how is the composition?
<b>MP DENNER</b>	<b>Well, you won't believe me, but actually we don't keep record of the gender or race composition of our party because we regard everyone as being equal and I think that is maybe the first step to ultimate equality, which is regarding each other as equal, but nonetheless, we are two women (off the top of my head), we are two women in the caucus of ten in the National Assembly, myself and my colleague Tammy Breedt and we have multiple women in provincial legislatures, in some we have sole female representation and if I think about it quickly, I believe the majority of our counsellors in the country are also women, which I think says something</b>

	<b>about the unique ability of women being service and community orientated, because as you know the core business of local government is service delivery to communities and I think that women are in the unique position or are uniquely positioned to be service orientated and to serve our communities and I think especially in local government we can make a huge contribution to that.</b>
DR. MALKA	Tell us more about your journey into politics; did it stem from the idea of being able to be of service?
MP DENNER	<b>Well, my journey into politics started out when I, well formally, when I was a student at the University of the Free State, I took part in a student representative council elections as a member of the FF Plus, and I was elected to the SRC and I think that stemmed from a place where one wanted to be available to deliver a service to your fellow students and to the campus and to contribute towards campus life, so I was elected as a member of the SRC in the 2007 elections and thereafter I was fortunate enough to be elected as SRC president in the 2008 elections and from there I served on various internal structures such as the Provincial FF Plus Exco until 2019, about, when I was elected to parliament on the national list of the FF Plus. So that's, in short, my journey into politics; obviously there were many memorable moments in-between, many tears were cried and we laughed a lot, but that is in short the journey.</b>
DR. MALKA	What I find interesting about what you've said is that you started coming into politics at university, being part of the SRC, and it's a trend or a pattern that I observe across different political parties on how people form part of the youth structures and then grow within the political structure and up its hierarchies.
MP DENNER	<b>Yes that's true, many of our colleagues that I see now in parliament as well, I know started out in the SRC when I started out about fifteen years ago, thirteen years ago, so I think the role that we play as politicians, especially in higher structures such as the legislatures and in parliament, is quite a responsibility on your shoulders and I think that starting out as a student, being nurtured and growing into politics and understanding the structures because it can be quite difficult to understand and confusing, but starting out as a student and learning and actually growing into it, gives you quite an advantage to be able to navigate your way through everything.</b>
DR. MALKA	One of the questions that I wanted to ask you is in relation to gender inequalities; women have several issues to contend with with respect to being able to reduce gender differentials in pursuit of equality; the World Economic Forum regularly published a Global Gender Gap report and uses four core dimensions; one focuses on economic participation and opportunity, a second on educational attainment, a third on health and survival and the fourth on political empowerment. Generally, the educational attainment we're nearly on parity, followed by health and survival, then the third is economic participation and opportunity and the fourth is political empowerment. So, legislation and quotas, as we chatted, are a couple of interventions to help accelerate progress; in your views, how do you think we can close gender gaps more rapidly?
MP DENNER	<b>Ya, as you mentioned, we've chatted about quotas and I think I've made my opinion on quotas clear, I just want to add that we have legislated quotas as is but I do feel that there should be a sunset clause with regards to numerical targets, so we can take up the opportunity, full opportunity or we can take up the role and responsibility for opportunity creation and the creation of wellbeing into our own hands and then to get back to your question; economic prosperity should be our number one priority, with that the elimination of social ills such as crime, especially GBV and substance abuse will be and should be eliminated, but first and foremost, we should straighten out our education system, because education empowers like nothing else and before we straighten our education system,</b>

	<b>no other attempts will be successful.</b>
DR. MALKA	You're so right, everything is interlinked, but if you've got the right foundation through education which provides those opportunities, those exposures, knowing right from wrong and being able to develop, that can evolve into economic opportunities with the right types of mindsets and psyches for progress, so you're right, it does start at education.
	<b>AD BREAK</b>
DR. MALKA	Today we're talking to member of parliament, Heloise Denner, from the Freedom Front Plus, we would love to receive your comments on Twitter:@WomanityTalk.
DR. MALKA	Ms. Denner, we're coming towards the latter part of the show and in that section it tends to be more of a personal perspective and one of the questions I ask my guests on this programme who've all made tremendous achievements in their respective fields of expertise, is about the factors that they consider have contributed to their success; whether that's about hard work, perseverance, faith, a particular person in their life. In your opinion, please tell us, what would you say have been some of your key drivers?
MP DENNER	<b>Well I must say I am very thankful to able to say that I have had so many more opportunities than so many other women of my day and age and even before me and for that, as I said, I am eternally thankful and humble. We had the conversation before the interview as well and I can never be thankful enough for the opportunities that I've had, but I don't think that I or any of us would have the opportunities that we have had if it had not been for the women and like-minded men even, before us. There are so many examples of strong women in history that have contributed to the circumstances we find ourselves in today and even to the way we think and see ourselves as women, I can think off the top of my head, figures in history like Emily Hobhouse who served the women and children in the concentration camps during the Anglo Boer War, Charlotte Maxeke who marched against the atrocities that were committed against women of colour in history. So strong women that have had an influence on my life is most definitely my grandmother, to get to a more personal view; my grandmother had to overcome many adversities in her life and she will always stand out in my mind as a matriarch and a formidable force to be reckoned with, who raised my mother, who has been a self-employed, independent and strong example for my entire life and I am so thankful for them and, as I said, the women that have come before us. So I think it's a mix of people, but most definitely on a personal level, my grandmother and mother has made me who I am today.</b>
DR. MALKA	It certainly sounds like you had strong role models in your life and I think, you know, as we do these conversations we hear more and more insights that people share and I feel like an area that is lacking is mentorship; whether it is formal or informal, to provide guidance and really help direct people in their trajectories.
MP DENNER	<b>Yes absolutely, as I've mentioned before, we should set the example, women that are fortunate enough to be in a position like I am for instance, should set the example and should become more community involved in the lives of our girls, to be mentors and to help them and set them on a path to where they can also achieve their own personal success, so I absolutely agree with you Dr. Malka, mentorship is very important and I don't think there's enough of it going around and that's our responsibility to see to it.</b>
DR. MALKA	Today you're a successful member of parliament representing your party, you went to university, you studied law and that's shaped who you are currently, but casting back into your mind, can you share with us some of the pivotal moments in your life growing up that started you on this journey?
MP DENNER	<b>Shew, casting back in my mind; I think one moment that stands out in my mind definitely in recent years, was the day after the 2019 elections when</b>

	<p>myself and my colleague Tammy Breedt, who I have mentioned before, were alone at the results centre after two or three days without any sleep, when we realised watching the vote tallies come in, that we were both finally elected and going to either parliament or the legislature, because we weren't clear on who was going where at that moment; I think that stands out because that absolute feeling of relief and ya, of realising that we've come so far and we've worked so hard and finally we've achieved something, not only as politicians, but as women, was a very humbling feeling and that definitely stands out in my mind. I can't single out a single event or an influence that has made me the person that I am today, what I can say though, is that I think we are the sum of our experiences and interactions with other people and faith, as you've mentioned as an example, faith has always played a big role in my life, I actively try to be a better person and a better Christian every day, sometimes..most days I actually think I fail, but I do try and then people that stand out; my parents, family, friends and colleagues and most probably my husband motivates me and makes me a better person every day.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Thanks for sharing some of those moments and I'm glad you mentioned Tammy Breedt, we hosted her on the show about two years ago, which must have been just after the 2019 elections had come through; it must have been a very proud moment. Given what you know now, what would be your advice to a younger person or the younger you, knowing what you know now?</p>
MP DENNER	<p><b>Oh there are many things that I would like to say to a younger me, I think the biggest thing of all is everything will be okay, it always is, but I think advice that I would give to myself that I've learned through especially my work as a politician, is I think the most important thing to remember is that you have a voice and that your voice matters and that it's your responsibility to make your voice heard and no-one else's. I also think what I would have liked to realise sooner, was that no-one owes you anything because you are a woman, you owe yourself and other women the duty to make the way forward and to set an example through hard work and perseverance and if I may say this in Afrikaans, I'll translate it in English as well, but we as women must staan op, staan saam en staan sterk, which in short means that we must stand up, stand together and stand strong.</b></p>
DR. MALKA	<p>That's a fantastic statement; "stand up, stand together and stand strong". Lastly, as we close out our discussion today, please can you share a few words of inspiration or wisdom that you'd like to pass onto girls and women who are listening to us on the continent?</p>
MP DENNER	<p><b>Yes, as I said, I think the most important thing to remember is that your voice matters and that you have to speak up and don't be afraid of what people might think, you owe yourself the responsibility to stand up and to stand strong and to set the example for those who come after you.</b></p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Thank you very much for joining us, it's been wonderful having you on the show and please continue holding government to account and at the same time, making the differences in so many people's lives; our citizens of the country.</p>
MP DENNER	<p><b>Thank you Dr. Malka it was quite a privilege, I really do appreciate it.</b></p>
	<p><b>PROGRAMME END</b></p>