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PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: MS. LIESL VAN DER MERWE – INKATHA FREEDOM PARTY

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. Liezl Van der Merwe from the Inkatha Freedom Party, who serves as a member of parliament and sits on several committees, such as the Committee on Multi-Party Women's Caucus, the Joint Committee on Ethics and Members Interests, the Portfolio Committee on Home Affairs and the Portfolio Committee on Social Development. Welcome to the show!
MS. VAN DER MERWE	Thank you very much, it's really lovely to be here and thank you for that great introduction.
DR.MALKA	Ms. Van der Merwe over the course of this series we've spoken to several female members of parliament from the Democratic Alliance, the Economic Freedom Fighters, the Freedom Front Plus, the African Transformation Movement and now today the Inkatha Freedom Party. I'd like to say that there's been two common points of conversation that have emerged; one being about service to citizens and holding government to account for respective departments to deliver on their mandate and the second is affecting meaningful change. You serve on four committees and in the committees that you're part of, do you feel that there's adequate representation of women and are their voices heard?
MS. VAN DER MERWE	Well I would say most definitely we are adequately represented on my portfolio committees, if you look for example on my portfolio committee of Social Development, we are mostly female members of parliament serving on that portfolio committee, bar for two male MP's. On my Home Affairs Portfolio Committee we are also a 50/50% representation there. I do think that our voices are heard, I do think that as female members of parliament we do drive issues around the emancipation of women, we make sure that we do lobby in our various committees for our departments to focus on projects for women. We also do speak, for example, in our committees about issues such as the employment of women in our various committees, so I do believe our voices are heard but I guess the question becomes whether us being represented in the numbers that we are on our various portfolio committees, whether our voices result in real change for women on the ground, for the women that we represent and I don't necessarily think that representation always directly translates into real change for women on the ground. So I would say we are fairly well represented, I think we do drive and speak for gender equality and empowerment of women in those portfolio committees, but again, you know, it goes about as you said in the introduction, whether our voices being heard translates into real change for women because at the end of the day if our voices are not strong enough to hold to account the various departments and the roles and responsibilities that they've got towards women in the execution of their duties, then at the end of the day that doesn't translate into the empowerment of women in the communities that we serve on, but we are well represented.

DR.MALKA	Representation is always a positive and I do want to dwell, a little bit later on in terms of the aspects of driving meaningful change, so we'll discuss that in a moment, but staying currently with the portfolios that you sit on and you mentioned the fact that one; obviously we've got strong representation of women and part of having that representation means that women's issues do get heard. So can you tell us about a few of the priority points or focal areas in relation to women on the portfolio committees that you serve on, specifically in Home Affairs and Social Development?
MS. VAN DER MERWE	So, we know that of course the Department of Social Development focuses heavily, well its entire budget, most of its budget is spent on SASSA, so we know that women bear the brunt of poverty, we know that women remain on the fringes of the economy, we know that it's female households, about 75% of female households in rural areas for example, are female led. So the work of SASSA is very important because once SASSA, if SASSA is not working, if for example SASSA queues are very long or the application processes for grants are very difficult, then of course that impacts directly on women. So in our Portfolio Committee of Social Development we've spent a lot of time, I served during a time when SASSA was going through a lot of difficulties and I think we have managed to stabilise SASSA in such a way that it's a more responsive entity currently that it helps to alleviate poverty and like I said, the face of poverty in South Africa unfortunately, is still a female face. So, we...you know, and of course also in that portfolio committee, although South Africa now has a National Strategic Plan to fight gender based violence, the main lead department in the fight against gender based violence, although I don't think that they're doing enough, is the Department of Social Development, so we do, you know, we do focus on those issues quite a lot, which of course has got a female face and we know gender based violence in South Africa is a crises. So, a lot of our work I would say in that portfolio committee centres around women and children and in particular vulnerable women and children, then also on the Department of Home Affairs of course it's not so heavily focused on issues pertaining to women, but what is also encouraging is that of late, in this Annual Performance Plan, the Department of Home Affairs will now also be focusing on gender based violence awareness programmes and of course we lobby as female parliamentarians, for example that, you know, there must be special arrangements when, you know, a woman visits...a woman with a child for example visits home affairs offices, that they should be treated differently and then of course, also remember, if the Department of Home Affairs is not functional, if also their systems are continuously down or offline it means that in many cases women cannot access birth certificates for their children and then also they cannot access government services. So a lot of these issues that doesn't look like it's got a female element or a female face, you know, many departments if they don't work or they don't deliver, it actually negatively impacts on the future and empowerment of women.
DR.MALKA	Thanks for highlighting some of the work that's underway and also giving that perspective of how these departments affect or impact on women. One of the committees that you sit on is the Multi-Party Women's Caucus; I'd like to hear what your views are on the role of the Multi-Party Women's Caucus to accelerate issues facing women in the country, whether it is aspects of gender based violence to pay parity to equal opportunities in the economy, as well as components of paid care labour?
MS. VAN DER MERWE	Look, I'm going to be very honest, I think the Multi-Party Women's Caucus, it's a great initiative because at the end of the day, you know,

	<p>where it comes to women's issues all of us as female MP's need to stand together to obviously fight for the real and meaningful empowerment of women. So, I would say it's a noble idea, it's a great initiative, but, what we need to guard against as parliamentarians is this habit of getting into a situation where we end up having talk shops and workshops and seminars and this committee unfortunately while it's got no, you know, it sort of strives to make a meaningful impact on a variety of issues, whether it's on the delivery of free sanitary pads or fighting gender based violence or addressing issues such as the chronic underfunding of shelters for women and children, this Multi-Party Women's Caucus doesn't have special powers for, you know, special implementation powers, it doesn't have a budget for example. So while there is good in that we get together as female MP's across the political divide and we do unite around issues, you know, I would have like to have seen a situation where maybe let's take the issue of the gender pay gap, now, in South Africa our parliament is very quiet where comes to the gender pay gap and yet the gender pay gap stands at 30% and then if you go and look at legislation, I mean it is legislated against, companies cannot pay women less than they pay men, but it's about the fact that these laws are not implemented and to that effect this Multi-Party Women's Caucus for example, if we are to be really effective and I'm hoping that, you know, in months to come we can take this type of approach, but really one would then have to, you know, call the Minister of Labour and Employment to this committee and ask him for sort of timeframes in which, you know, they can make sure that they, you know, hold to account implement legislation so that we start to address issues like the gender pay gap. Similarly, it was around 2012/2013 that the then President Jacob Zuma announced that all indigenous school girls should have access to free sanitary pads, now as things stand we have not in the seven or eight years really moved...government's not really moved on this pledge or this, you know, offer that they made to young women and we know that when young women do not have access to sanitary pads they lose school days and eventually it means that there's a gap in their education or some girls even drop out. So, in this instance as well, one should be calling to account the Minister of Finance, one should be calling to account the various role players in government that should have made this happen a long time ago. I mean if we can roll out free condoms to the extent that we did in the various, you know, you can walk into any public bathroom and have access and men can have access to condoms, so, if government was so successful in rolling out that project, then there should not really be a problem with the way they go about rolling out sanitary pads and in fact, this campaign has been very erratic, I think some provinces have rolled it out and some haven't. So, this committee in essence what I'm trying to say is, it's a good initiative, but it needs to have a little bit more teeth, you know, it needs to develop its own implementation powers and that would mean that all of us would have to make sure that we call to account, in front of this Multi-Party Women's Caucus, the various ministers and departments that fail our women.</p>
DR.MALKA	<p>So much of what you're saying reminds me of the point that if something gets measured it gets counted, if something has got a budget it becomes more accountable and if you don't have the powers to drive something forwards, then you just don't get that type of traction. When you talk about the aspect of rolling out free sanitary wear, I was doing some rudimentary calculations and I thought on average, if a girl, a woman will have...a girl or woman, will have her cycle and she will be out of action for probably a week every month; that's 25% of a year. If you keep thinking about the accumulated affects of being out of</p>

	<p>school for 25% of the time, effectively four months of the year, you will never, ever be able to catch up, so it's a major hindrance and if, as you say, we could roll out free condoms, why on earth can't we roll out free sanitary pads to a generation that absolutely needs it?</p>
<p>MS. VAN DER MERWE</p>	<p>So that is exactly my point, what I don't understand is when we, you know, we pay lip-service often as politicians to a variety of issues, but for example, if we say we are really passionate about the empowerment of women and I mean this is something that our government has often said, that they do want to be seen to be part of empowering women and ending gender inequality, they want to see the emancipation of women. Now, if you look at that pledge or that commitment, that statement and then on the other hand you've got ample evidence to suggest that by not affording poor learners, especially in rural areas, access to sanitary wear, you are in fact robbing them of education and in fact robbing them of their future potential, then it really doesn't make any sense to me if we're saying on the one hand that we are so passionate about the empowerment of women and then on the other hand we fail in rolling out the very basics that could empower our women and this is a small thing that we could do really well to ensure that young women are able to stay in school. One thing that I'm very proud of is that in our last local government election, my political party, I was able to lobby the leadership of my political party to say that where we govern in the municipalities that we win, we should be able to...our mayors should be able to make available free sanitary wear to school girls in those areas that need them. I was extremely touched because one of the mayor's invited me to attend one of the ceremonies where he had gone and he had asked local business, he had asked, you know, community leaders to donate sanitary wear and he had called school girls to an event where you heard harrowing stories of young girls who had told us, crying, that would not have been able to sit for their final exams for example, that year, they would probably have not been able to write their exams, some of them, had they not had that intervention at that stage. So, you know, I sometimes feel that so much more can be done; if you speak about, for example, fighting gender based violence and again you think about the impact gender based violence has got on families, on women, on their future prospects, on job opportunities and then you think about the chronic under-funding of our shelters for abused women and children, you know in South Africa we spend about R550 on a prisoner in jail, so a man might have committed a gender based violence crime, he goes to a prison, he's got access to three meals, he's got access to education, our government spends R550 on that prisoner, yet, when a mother and a child seeks refuge at a shelter for abused women and children, some of these shelters receive as little as R5, or if they're lucky, R50 a day from government. So there's really an imbalance, if I can put it like that, in the way government views its spending or executes its spending on women's empowerment projects. So I think also our government has got to look at, they often talk about gender responsive budgeting, but our budgets are very, you know, it doesn't have a female element to it and yet we know that, you know, when you put money into the hands of women they spend it on their families, they spend it on their communities, so I think there needs to be a shift in the way we spend our money and I think that will really have a very positive influence and impact on women and their lives and ultimately it will actually, you know, be a driver for change in South Africa as a whole.</p>
<p>DR.MALKA</p>	<p>Staying with the themes that you've spoken about in terms of how budgets are being distributed; I've been doing this programme for eight years and after eight years, statistically speaking, not much seems to have changed for women and</p>

	<p>one of the arguments that I continue to have is this idea that how can we accelerate change, how can we make things move more quickly, and when you speak about components of the way that budget spends its money, I had a very interesting conversation recently with Professor Tregenna from the University of Johannesburg and we spoke about fiscal policy as being a potential mechanism for accelerating change, to direct expenditure in order to benefit women, exactly like you're saying in terms of having gender responsive budgeting and the fact that budgets are renewed on an annual basis. So given what you know now and your experience as a member of parliament, how do you think we can help motivate to reconfigure budgets so that they do have more of a gender lens or a female lens in these types of scenarios?</p>
<p>MS. VAN DER MERWE</p>	<p>You see there's been a lot of talk at government level in terms of gender responsive budgeting and it's something that we throw around at parliament with the various portfolio committees, but unfortunately, if you look at treasury it's mostly male led and then you do see your female ministers often speaking about gender responsive budgeting and the need for that. So I think at the end of the day, like I said, you know, we as parliamentarians...it goes back to holding the executive to account but also for female ministers for example, to have a greater voice in cabinet to say for example, it cannot be that we continue to talk about gender responsive budgeting and it goes to members of parliament as well, I think it's a theme we should, you know, speak about more in parliament. Firstly, our population is mostly female, we've got you know, there's a lot of evidence to suggest as well that, you know, once females lead in a certain area there's more stability, there's more growth, so there's definitely a need for us to go past talking about gender responsive budgeting and seeing to it that it's implemented as aggressively as we need it to be. But again it goes back to us as female MPs using our voices as a collective, together with our ministers and to ensure that we start making those who put together the numbers and the budgets see the need and understand the need for budgets to have a female face and what that means in terms of how we can turn around South Africa. So I'm completely in favour of it, I think you know, gender responsive budgeting for me it makes a lot of sense and I think we can do a lot of good effect a lot of change if our budgets are more female responsive.</p>
<p>DR.MALKA</p>	<p>It was very heart-warming to hear you relay the story about one of your mayors making motivations of being able to bring in free sanitary wear and the stories of the girls that are actually being the beneficiaries so that they could sit their exams. So staying for a moment on the Inkatha Freedom Party; it is an established political party which exists to serve the people of South Africa and to do so in the spirit of Ubuntu; please tell us what's the composition of women in the party?</p>
<p>MS. VAN DER MERWE</p>	<p>So I don't think during Covid we updated our membership only because of course we need to, you know, go to communities to be able to do that, but I think in our last membership census, if I can put it like that, we were probably more female members of the party than male. In the IFP for example, I served on the IFP's National Council, the IFP's National Council is the highest decision-making body of the IFP and there for example we've got a 50/50 representation of female and men. So, I think the IFP's always viewed and it's something that you often read if you go and look back at some of the historical speeches, it is indeed the fourth largest political party in the country, we're the third largest opposition party and it was established in 1975 and if you look at some of the literature dating back, the IFP has always believed in women as being it's</p>

	backbone, you know, recognising the value and importance of women. The ANC's got a 50/50% representation policy, I think at our last conference ours was 60/40 but we are striving towards having 50/50% representation in all our decision-making structures, like we've got at our IFP National Council.
DR.MALKA	And how do you think we can encourage more women to take up politics professionally?
MS. VAN DER MERWE	You know that's a difficult one, but I would say women, you know, if you for example in my case as a young girl growing up, I believed...I think I was about ten years old when I thought to myself that I really wanted to make a change or be involved in being a part of change in South Africa and I thought long and hard about it, I thought maybe I should become a lawyer, but something always drew me to politics and when I started talking about my ambitions to be a politician, especially in the community where I grew up, people were very, you know, very negative and I can't even remember a single person who supported my ambition to be a politician. So I want to really say to women that, you know, if you do believe that you want to make a change, you know, you want to be involved in politics, you want to work for your community and you are passionate about people and wanting to see a stronger, better South Africa, that nothing should stop you from being part of politics. I mean if you look at examples currently around the world; we've got a president, a female president now in Tanzania, we've got a deputy vice president, a female vice president in America, you've got the president of New Zealand who's absolutely excellent, so I think there's so many great examples of when women lead, how great they are in leading and so I would really like to encourage young women to put up their hands, step forward and say, you know, I'm ready to lead and I think, you know, nothing should stop us from being involved in politics if you're doing it for the right reasons. If it's something that you're passionate about and it's something you deeply care about you should definitely put up your hand and be encouraged and know that within the structures, for example, you know at parliament, I think a lot of us female MPs, whether we're on the ANC benches, EFF, IFP or DA, we do support one another, so really I think it's worthwhile to take up if you're truly passionate and committed to the cause.
DR.MALKA	Building female leadership capacity is incredibly important, it's one of the route's where if we can get more women into leadership positions where they are capable, where they are confident and driving meaningful effective change and you've cited some of the prime ministers and presidents and vice presidents of the world who are women and we often talk about them on this programme. In your opinion what do you think needs to happen to ensure that we can get more women to make it to the top, whether that is in the political space, whether that is in the business world or academic sphere?
MS. VAN DER MERWE	I think we who occupy space should really take a more active role in mentoring. I think, you know, I've thought about it but I think it's something that I will eventually speak to the speaker of parliament, of our own parliament to, I mean she's for example a wonderful leader herself, I've got the greatest respect for Thandi Modise, our speaker, you know when she speaks you are captivated, it's also somebody who, you know, she obviously has a rich history, but she's a very strong female politician and you know, you don't have to be an ANC member to look up to her qualities and her leadership skills, but I think we who occupy space, we who have fought to be where we are should take a greater role in mentoring and that is also, you know, it goes for businesses as well and I even thought that at

	<p>some stage maybe, you know, in the month of August when we do celebrate women's month, maybe parliament could, you know, encourage it's female MPs to take in some, you know, some young people who...young women who would like to be involved in politics, I mean we do get them in our various structures in our political parties and bring them in, you know, and mentor them, show them the ropes, show them what it looks like to be inside the chambers of parliament, you know, take them to portfolio committee meetings, show them that, you know, you don't have to be intimidated by male voices and I think if we start by making small meaningful gestures like that, you know, that's more meaningful and impactful than talking about just, you know, encouraging women to say to them, you know, take part in politics or you know dream of being a CEO of a company. I think if we start mentoring, taking and showing young people the ropes, young women the ropes it will become much easier for them to ascend to those spaces where we are, you know, we didn't have that, I think many of us, I remember coming in as a young female MP and I struggled in my first portfolio committee meetings because I, you know, I had nobody to show me the ropes, but I had to find my way and like I said, it was a dream that I had from a young age, but I do think it will be easier if we take an active role in mentoring, you know, female leaders should consider very strongly that we should be giving back and that's a possible solution to start helping people get into these spaces.</p>
DR.MALKA	<p>It's so important to have someone who's walked that journey before to be able to give back and I think that it's always a way of, instead of having someone walk through the same pain processes that you had to undergo, that if you can give them that leap forwards, gives them a bit of an accelerant.</p>
MS. VAN DER MERWE	<p>No definitely and you know what, I'm thinking back, you know, from where I've come from, you know, in the beginning, like I said, when I didn't have anybody, at that stage also our caucus was relatively small so I didn't have, there were not many other females in my caucus, so I was a young female amongst males who had been there for many, many years and literally, you know, I struggled because I didn't really know...not only did I not know the ropes, but I also became unnecessarily hard on myself, you know, for example to go to a portfolio committee you have to study your documents and then you have to ask tough questions and I remember my maiden speech, standing at the podium thinking look to my right, there's all these struggle heros, there's Naledi Pandor, you know, at that stage it was still Trevor Manuel and because I didn't have somebody saying to me you know what, you are well prepared, you did your homework, there's nothing to be nervous about, we are here to support you, I became quite hard on myself because I felt that everything that I was doing was not good enough or I was failing in my duties to hold the executive to account and I've had to...I've had to, you know, get out of that, I've had to sort of...but I mean I'm generally a hard worker so I do believe that when I go to meetings I'm well prepared and I do my best and I do justice to what I'm supposed to be doing, but I do feel that if I had somebody to hold my hand in the earlier years, maybe I could have, you know, gotten out of the starting blocks a little bit faster. So I do, ya, I do strongly believe in giving back and I think it's very important that parliament itself strongly considers these type of mentorship programmes for young women, because I don't even think if you look at the continent, I've interacted with many female MPs from various other countries like Malawi and Tanzania, etcetera, I don't think it's something that we do as female parliamentarians, but I think really it's something that like I said earlier, we get into these habits of talking about the empowerment of women, but</p>

	this for example is a small practical step that we can take as a parliament to encourage throughout the month of August to have these mentorship programmes where we take in young women who have got aspirations to lead and mentor and give back.
DR.MALKA	That would be a great one to introduce into the Multi-Party Women's Caucus.
MS. VAN DER MERWE	Most definitely.
DR.MALKA	Now, I'd like to ask you about your personal journey and factors of success, many of the guests who've been on our show speak about discipline, focus, faith and values; please tell us, in your opinion, what have been some of the key drivers to your success
MS. VAN DER MERWE	I think firstly it was my sense of purpose, like I said, I knew from a young age...well maybe let me start by saying I grew up with a mother who herself had been a victim of gender based violence and that impacted very heavily on her life, my mother didn't finish her matric, my mother ended up having to work three jobs to look after me and my mother eventually developed depression and other forms of mental illness, all going back from her own childhood and so as I eventually in my twenties became the primary caregiver of my mother, I realised that I wanted to be a strong woman and I wanted to go to parliament to fight the very things that robbed my mother of being the woman that she could have been. So, I think from a very young age I knew that I wanted to one, be a strong woman, but I wanted to go and fight for people like my mother and I wanted to ensure that when I do get to parliament that I speak on women's issues, that I fight, you know, for women to be able to take up their space to be leaders, that we fight patriarchy, that we fight things that hold women back and you know I feel very blessed that in fact, you know, an Afrikaans girl, when people told me that, you know, South Africa's changing, there's no space for some of us in politics, that I was able to make it to where I am. But I would say I've always been very disciplined, I've worked really hard in my life, I think if I even have to...at one stage I was working a day job, a night job, a weekend job to get me to where I am, so definitely I think my values, my hard work, my discipline, my focus, my drive, my sense of purpose, my sense of knowing what I wanted to get out of this process and also I think at the end of the day, you know, I went into politics for the right reasons, I'm not in politics to do anything else but to try and effect meaningful change for people like my mother and so the journey has been a hard one but a very enjoyable one and I continue to be immensely blessed, but I really want to say that anything, anything is possible if you've got a passion for what you are pursuing and if you're willing to work really, really hard and I think that's how...that was my winning recipe, if I can put it like that.
DR.MALKA	Can you tell us who have been some of the strong women in your life as you were growing up, or even today?
MS. VAN DER MERWE	I think, I must say in my life I've had a lot of strong female friends. I grew up...I went to a boarding school, so I formed a lot of friendships at boarding school, you know, my one friend, she's a CEO of a company, you know, I've got friends...I've been blessed in my life to have very, very strong female friends and we've really supported one another, but you know, I've also looked towards other people in my life, you know, at a young age I was always watching Oprah, I think and you know this is a woman who also, she had been dealt some very tough cards in her life but she made the most of it and she's been such a success and if you also look at her life story and you know, some of the difficulties that she had to overcome, not only as a

	black woman but, you know, a child that grew up in a home where she was, you know she had a lot of difficulties with abuse or poverty and that she was able to transcend all of those difficulties, so you know, there are a lot of strong women that, you know, you can look up to and she's definitely been one of them but I've also been blessed to have good friends, strong female friends who have walked the journey with me and they were all there when I made my maiden speech, so they were all there rooting for me, so I've been blessed in that regard.
DR.MALKA	The sense that I get out of our conversation today is that from a very early age you've always had this view of being able to have an impact, of being able to drive and create change. So, as a young person growing up, tell us about some of the pivotal moments in your life.
MS. VAN DER MERWE	Well, I think, like I said, I mean I remember very vividly in...I was fourteen when South Africa moved from an apartheid state to a democratic country, I remember then saying to myself that, you know, I wanted to be...as a young white South African I wanted to be a part of this new South Africa, I wanted to built it into a better country. So my, I don't know, you know, it's difficult because when you speak to other people nobody really had this sense of wanting to serve, if I can put it like that, so my young age, you know, but I was a normal child, I grew up in a working class family, you know, I was blessed in the sense that I went to very good schools and I was able to even travel, I love travelling, so I was able to travel after school and then studied journalism, I was a very, you know, sports fanatic...well I was an athlete before I even became a politician, now all I do is travel and work, but ya, I had a good childhood, but I had a very, you know, like I said with the challenges that my mother had I was drawn to politics and wanting to be a part of a better South Africa.
DR.MALKA	And lastly, as we close out our conversation today, I'd appreciate it if you could 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?
MS. VAN DER MERWE	I would like to say to young women that don't let anybody ever discourage you from your dreams, your dreams are valid, if you can dream it, you can believe it and you can achieve it and really I want to say to every young woman if it's your dream to lead in whatever space, you can take up that space, and you know, don't be discouraged because some tell you that women have got certain roles to play in communities or society; we can be whatever we dream and believe that we want to be and so I would really like to say to every young woman and wherever you are and whatever community you are, you are special and your dreams are valid and pursue them and go for, you know, reach for the stars and I'm sure you will achieve it.
DR. MALKA	That's such a great message... "reach for the stars".
	PROGRAMME END