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**PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY**

**GUEST NAME: MS ALEXANDRA ABRAHAMS – DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE AND MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT**

<b>SPEAKER</b>	<b>TRANSCRIPTION</b>
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 Alexandra Abrahams from the Democratic Alliance and Member of Parliament; she serves on the Portfolio Committee of Social Development. Welcome to the show!
<b>MS ABRAHAMS</b>	<b>Good morning Dr. Malka and good morning to all your listeners and compliments of the season to you and your listeners and I look forward to our discussion this morning; thank you for having me.</b>
DR. MALKA	It's our pleasure to host you and compliments of the new year to you too. To begin with, serving in parliament is a massive national responsibility where decisions impact the lives of approximately 60 million people. So, please can you tell us what made you decide to pursue a career in politics and become a politician?
<b>MS ABRAHAMS</b>	<b>Thank you for that question, so my why politics didn't start when I was young, I initially wanted to be a diplomat, hence studying international relations at Stellenbosch University and politics and political science were just modules throughout the course in which I graduated in with my honours. I then, you know, put my CV into about 40 A4 white envelopes with postage stamps back then and I just sent it everywhere because I could already feel the weight of my student loans dragging me down, you know, and this fear of not finding a job to repay those student loans, a fear that is currently a reality for the majority of the young people in our country and so the very next year, in 2009, I was fortunate enough to be employed by the Democratic Alliance as an assistant to the Campaign Manager of the Western Cape Provincial Campaign Team. So that was an exciting time and then of course from 2011 until I was elected as an MP in 2019, I worked within the Ministry of Social Development and it was an exciting time because I was able to see DA Policy implemented within a provincial government and to witness real change in people's lives and it was during this time that my why politics took root, it was being active in politics in a government that brought about mass and tangible change to people's lives and then also just lastly I strongly believe that I was steered into this direction by my faith, by something bigger than myself and in the first few years at social development I would tell my mom, you know mom I didn't study to be a social worker yet here I am and, you know, her words has stayed with me since, that perhaps I am where I am meant to be and I should stop questioning it and just have more faith.</b>
DR. MALKA	That's such an interesting background into your journey into the political spectrum, often I find that many people study one particular subject, but we do learn transferable skills that apply into different subject areas.
<b>MS ABRAHAMS</b>	<b>Yes indeed, it's just about navigating this space and it is also about the interactions that you meet with people along the journey that, you know, end up where you are meant to be and the journey is not complete, you know, being a member of parliament is a five-year term, you apply every</b>

	<p>year. We can't have people in positions for decades because you don't see growth, if I am not growing and if I am not able to be giving and successfully giving input to my party, to the political space, to the residents of South Africa then someone who has got a better energy, better at the job needs to step in to be able to service the people. It is not about me or MPs and public reps, it is about the people of the country, staying in positions for 10/20 years, there is a tendency for some to become complacent in those positions where there are people looking in, knowing they can contribute more, but they just can't get access into the position, so that's just my view on that.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Those are very wise words and ones that I think should apply broadly across the spectrum. Staying with aspects of the Democratic Alliance itself for a moment; what is the party's policy on representation of women within its structures?</p>
MS ABRAHAMS	<p>So the DA's values are freedom, fairness, opportunity and diversity and we do not have a specific policy on representation of women within our structures as far as I am aware, but I believe that you know, by promoting diversity and our zero tolerance on discrimination, women within the DA are free to apply for any position within any structure of the party and you know if we look at any one of our DA caucuses in any three spheres of government across the entire country, you will find that the DA is actually the most representative of not only women, but race and of age and religion. So, you know, with the absence of a specific policy on representation within the party, it also doesn't mean that we are oblivious to the gender gap, you know, created by past and current exploitations of women, because it is highlighted within our Economic Justice Policy with corrective steps. So we are aware of it and, you know, I also look at my own constituency where I am the constituency head and the majority of our members and our activists are actually women and I am of the opinion that it is because women, you know, they want to be actively involved in the community, in community work and in networking, so to stay informed of the programmes and the projects that, you know, government has to offer, not just men and their children, but that they can take out to their neighbours and just spread that information that only comes from being actively, you know, involved in your government on a local government level.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>How do you think we can encourage more women to take up active roles in politics, because to be able to drive meaningful change, if you take on a more active role in politics you have that opportunity?</p>
MS ABRAHAMS	<p>For me it is more about, you know, being an example, so leading by example. I also think it's important for young girls and women to be able to see a member of parliament that looks like them, that comes from the same area as they do so that they know it is possible and they know it's attainable. In my first year as a member of parliament, you know, I spoke at Northlink's Valedictory and I had gone to schools and a lot of primary schools and, you know, just the look on the children's eyes, especially the young girls, when you say that oh you are a member of parliament and you can see their eyes light up because it is something that they have never thought about and when you ask them oh so what do you want to be when you grow up, you know, they say the more common professions; they want to be a teacher, they want to be a doctor, then you ask them so who of you want to be a member of parliament and when you look like them and you are standing in front of them they realise that it is attainable, but you know, also I would encourage young girls and women and even older</p>

	women to follow female leaders, female presidents on social media and, you know, the more real-world and real-life role models on these social platforms. I would encourage everybody to visit parliament, it is the people's parliament after all and I know that we have stopped visitors because of COVID, but I am sure that they will open that up soon and also to follow our committee meetings, which are available on YouTube and also to follow our written questions on topics that interest women of our country and, you know, lastly this notion that politics does not affect you, we need to get rid of that because politics and our ruling government has the biggest impact on your life and on your future, it takes one policy, one law to change the course of a country and of your life, so you know, to be involved, to be active, it's actually taking control of your life.
DR. MALKA	Those are all fantastic points and you emphasised this issue of role modelling, of people being able to identify with someone who looks like them, who comes from the same community, but then at the same time, the great accessibility of social media which means that you can be able to follow female presidents, female leaders from across the world and understand what their interests are and potentially how those relate to you. Then emphasising the issue of the fact that this is the people's parliament and that political decisions make a real impact on your life as an individual, so people should be cognizant of what is happening and we live in a democracy and we have got this power to change by exercising our votes.
MS ABRAHAMS	<b>Yes certainly and I mean this last year being a local government election, our country had the worst turnout ever in history and it is really not a time for women and young people and a whole people to become complacent and to give up and I think, you know, in witnessing the formation of our new multiparty governments at local level, it's really setting the stage for what is possible for 2024 and I would also just encourage, you know, women to find a political home in which she shares the same values and principles, which is really, really important, and be part of the inevitable change that is coming in our country.</b>
	<b>AD BREAK</b>
DR. MALKA	Today we're talking to Ms Alexandra Abrahams from the Democratic Alliance, who is a Member of Parliament and serves on the Portfolio Committee of Social Development. We would love to receive your comments on Twitter: @WomanityTalk.
DR. MALKA	Ms Abrahams, when we were chatting at the beginning of the show you spoke about social development and being involved for, gosh, I think it's nearly a decade of your time or more within the social development space; can you tell us about some of the priority or focal points in relation to women within the Portfolio Committee of Social Development?
MS ABRAHAMS	<b>Yes I can. So one of the programmes, it falls under programmes for social welfare, the welfare programme and that is Social Crime Prevention and Victim Empowerment Programmes, it is within this programme where we address shelters. In a recent written question, you know, the department got back to us to say that there are 134 shelters that they run in partnership with NGO's and this is only equal to about 1,600 and I think 87 bed spaces, so now this is grossly inefficient and also the shelter section is also grossly underfunded. Another programme, this sub-programme is of course substance abuse, drugs and alcohol abuse has such a negative effect and a cycle on families and of course government also fund and have rehabilitation programmes and just to add, our committee, we have literally just finished public hearings on the Children's Amendment Bill and something that came up, you know, at most of these public hearings</b>

	<p>were parents who are desperate for assistance with their children. Their children with drug addiction, with discipline, they are dropping out of school and they are just so desperate for help, now government, we can't raise children for parents, but you know government and with the help of NGO partners can provide parents with the skills and the tools to navigate this journey with their children, because parenting methods that my grandparents and my parents used on me must change, because the type of child is completely different and it changes with every year. Then also we are busy with the Victims Support Services Bill and this bill has a focus on shelters, victim empowerment shelters and you know government just has to be really careful that we don't over-regulate sectors to a point that we handcuff the NGO's ability to function. So there's a lot of other things, you know, we have the SASSA, our social grant system and which is not also solely for women but we cannot ignore the fact that, you know, women carry the lions share as the primary care giver and we also cannot ignore the fact that, you know, poverty is a black woman's face, the single mother, and it is mostly the child support grant and foster care grant that is a safety net for these mothers and for the children and for the household and it is such a little money, R460.00 for the child support grant, not nearly enough to raise a child on, that's something that the DA has also long being advocating for, to increase it to at least the food poverty line. Another aspect that I found important is our early childhood development, ECDs, pressures, I say this because just knowing that your child is in a safe place, that they are learning, that they are socialising at the most crucial and fundamental stage in their lives, I would imagine is a huge weight off any mother's shoulders and, you know, the quality of life of a mother and a child is just so interconnected, knowing that your child is cared for while you are at work or while you are doing your studies, means that you can focus on your job and you can focus on your studies, that you succeed and you know when a mother succeeds so does her child. A better paying job means she can provide better and a better educated means she can give better advice to your children. So, you know, that is just a few of the topics, social development is very big.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>It is an extensive portfolio and I am sure you have just highlighted a few of the programmes that are under way. Thinking about some of these issues, some of these focal points seem to be completely essential factors, whether it is crime prevention, substance abuse, having rehabilitation programmes, the victim's support, or early childhood development, plus the social grant and for me it's almost a case of programmes that are put in place that help people at the very bottom of the pyramid. How do you see us getting people out of their situation and moving up the pyramid and away from their dependence of social development programme systems?</p>
MS ABRAHAMS	<p>So, you know, I see it, if I can use an example, the department has now only finalised their policy, it is called the Maternal Support Policy, I am yet to receive a copy despite asking, you know, for a copy of this policy, but basically it's my understanding that the social grant kicks in once your child is born, however, we now know that when the child is in the womb it needs nutrients as well, it is developing the minute that it is conceived. So this new programme is now meant to take that mother who has come into a government clinic, government hospital and holding their hand since that day up until the child is born, so you know, that is one positive because we have realised, you know, if you don't deliver a healthy baby, you know, strain on the systems, strain on the child, on the family starts already at birth. Another example for me is the basket of</p>

	<p>government services, so having access to the full basket of services, so once that child who is on the child support grant, you know, see that they are supported throughout their schooling career. We have a problem with dropout rates in our country, so it's how does government, with the systems of our NGO partners support that child up until they finish matric and then it's about getting that same child into our NSFAS bursary programme, supporting that child throughout tertiary education so that they one day can be able to get a job, a decent paying job that they in essence bring an income back to their family and slowly but surely getting families off welfare programmes through the fact that you've taken the child from conception all the way up to a tertiary level, helping them find a job to get an income back into that household. So that for me is how we see people, you know, get off the grant system and government, we just need to make sure that we provide the environment for them to succeed, that the internet cables are laid so that children can have access to internet, that the area is safe so that they can walk to school and walk to tertiary education and that there is a public transport system for example that functions so that they can get from A to B at the most cost effective possible.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>I wish that all of our systems functioned and worked 100%, but what is encouraging from what you've said is in a way, if the social development department and systems work effectively, what we will see is that a subsequent generation will be able to prosper and because they've worked through the system and that is one way that we get people out of this dependence on the state.</p>
<b>AD BREAK</b>	
DR. MALKA	<p>Today we're talking to Ms Alexandra Abrahams from the Democratic Alliance, who is a Member of Parliament and serves on the Portfolio Committee of Social Development. We would love to receive your comments on Twitter: @WomanityTalk.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Ms Abrahams, earlier in the conversation you mentioned the fact that you had pursued your degree in international relations; education is a priority for this show to empower girls and women with knowledge and capacitate them with skills. You hold an honours degree in political science from Stellenbosch University and as I mentioned you've got your undergrad degree in international relations; please can you tell us what role you would say education has played in your life?</p>
MS ABRAHAMS	<p>So my mother was an educator, so she started teaching at the age of 21 and she retired last year at the age of 64, so education in our home was very, very important, I think you know we used to play school, even though it wasn't school at home and our home was the house where all the children would come and do their homework because we were fortunate enough to have the Encyclopaedia books, to have the Encarta back then and I mean I even used to tutor for extra pocket money. I credit my education to my parents, it was important to both of them, they worked extremely hard and that they had two jobs to put three children through school and to give us four years of tertiary education and, you know, I remember crying because I wanted to go to a high school in the area where we lived and we lived in the Cape Flats and my parents weren't having it, they put me into an exceptional school in Newlands because they wanted me to have an access to more opportunities. You know another example that I can remember is my parents taking me out of dance for my matric year because they saw my grades dropping and I remember being so mad at them for it at that time, but every time I had to submit my</p>

	<p><b>matric results with an application I would thank them for making sure I stayed the academic course, but you know, education is important and to so many who don't have the support base that I have had growing up, it doesn't necessarily have to be a parent, it can be a teacher, it can be you know absolutely anybody, but as long as you just have someone in your corner motivating you.</b></p>
DR. MALKA	<p>It's a ticket to the game, I mean if you've got a solid education, you've got discipline behind you, you've got knowledge, you've got applied knowledge and as we mentioned earlier, transferable skills. I wanted to ask you now about some of your success factors, for example, many of the guests who have been on this show previously have spoken about faith, values and focus; in your view what would you say have been some of your key drivers of success?</p>
MS ABRAHAMS	<p><b>Well if I can just go back, as I mentioned you know, my parents were strict about education, but you know they were so strict that in my adult life I have had to go and unlearn a lot of the notions that we grew up with, for example that failing wasn't an option in our household or the concept of what an achievement is, because for a long time things that were achievements, such as, you know passing a grade, passing matric, getting your licence, getting a degree, in our home that was the norm, it was what was expected from myself and my siblings and it was when I got involved in social development that I realised that for a large majority of children just getting to school safely is an achievement in itself, that getting a learner's licence is an achievement for these children because children in those type of circumstances, you know, they need to be celebrated for the little things. So when I became a member of parliament it took me a long time to grasp what is success and what is achievement and this is me being successful and this is an achievement, because in the DA you actually have to apply and you go through multiple interviews against hundreds of equally successful, you know, candidates. Growing up and having a job and working hard was so ingrained in us that a big learning curve in my life has, you know, has been undoing all this conditions related to expectations and achievements and having to learn how to cope with failure and having to learn how to cope with disappointment and it has been in this growth journey that I realised that maintaining balance, maintaining a balanced life is incredibly important to me, that you work and you have fun and you look after your house and you spend time in your faith, but you also spend time with family and friends but also that you spend alone time, you know, with yourself and you know I think COVID really knocked me and I think it knocked, you know, everybody and I am still trying to find that balance that I had pre-COVID and that being a member of parliament and being a public represent is such a humbling opportunity and I have chosen this life as a public servant, I mean I have been a public servant since 2011. So you know, for me it's just about balance and you know accepting that especially this last two years, it's been lots of failures and lots of disappointment and lots of heartache, but you know, being able to say accept it, that it's okay and just to look forward to the next thing and to celebrate the small achievements, because they really are achievements, you know, we've looked at life in such a different way, well I for one have looked at life in such a different way this last two years.</b></p>
DR. MALKA	<p>The things that you're saying are also causing me to reflect and the fact is that context matters, conditions matter, we all come from different environments, we all come from different backgrounds and what may be important to one may not be as important to another and when you're talking about making</p>

	<p>these smaller gains, there's a professor in the States called Prof BJ Fogg and he said part of our successes come through from forming tiny habits, that sometimes we want to eat the elephant and get it all done and dusted, but it is about taking one small step at a time and with the world that we're living in today where nothing is predictable, that trying to be in control of some of these small pieces gives us a sense of accomplishment, so thank you for sharing that from your perspective.</p>
<p><b>MS ABRAHAMS</b></p>	<p><b>It's a pleasure and you know it's been a journey and I have just been really blessed with incredibly supportive friends, but also incredibly supportive colleagues, so I have just been really fortunate and very blessed in that regard.</b></p>
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>Building up to this point in your life, you mentioned your parents were very strict, strong emphasis on education, you grew up in the Cape Flats; can you tell us about some of the pivotal moments that have shaped you?</p>
<p><b>MS ABRAHAMS</b></p>	<p><b>So I would like to think that, you know, becoming a member of parliament has been a pivotal moment for me, it's taught me so much in terms of public service, it's taught me so much in that I was placed in a constituency that I never grew up in, that I wasn't familiar with, so it has opened my eyes and it has opened my heart to a whole new community of people. It's also shown me, travelling throughout our country, what an incredibly beautiful, beautiful country we have and what lovely people we have, you know, in our country and it just makes you work harder and push harder to see people succeed in life and, you know, within this job and within social development, you know, it just makes you ... I'm trying to find the right words ... so upset, you know, when you look at people's circumstances and you're like but it shouldn't be this way, you know, there is more than enough resources in our country, there is more than enough money in the state coffers that people don't have to live in poverty. In our public hearings on the Children's Amendment Bill we were told heartbreaking stories of young children who, you know, are just left unattended and left to their own devices and, you know, allegations of parents abusing the social grant and you know you sometimes sit and you wonder, you know, how did we as a country get to this place and I think, you know, going back to my why am I still in politics, it's because I do believe through the right government, through implementation, through you know just stopping corruption and to stop all the talk shops and I just wish that if every single department can just get just the basics of their mandate correct, we will just see a decrease in, you know GBV, a decrease in crime and just an overall improved quality of life for everybody. Being a member of parliament has been a big pivotal role in my life and if I can just maybe jump a bit back, you know, I also think being fortunate enough to travel abroad and to see different cultures and different environments has also been an extremely great opportunity and a great privilege that I know so many children and young people that I work with daily, will never get to experience.</b></p>
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>Thanks for sharing. When we think about politics and we think about politicians, you've really demonstrated that you're in politics for the right reason and I think that a lot of people will take comfort in hearing that, that people like yourself occupying positions in parliament to drive meaningful change. We know that there are a lot of issues within the country, but if you are equipped with the right tools and the right mindset and having less talk and more action.</p>
<p><b>MS ABRAHAMS</b></p>	<p><b>No certainly and if I can use an example of, you know, we speak about political will so very often and you know a classic example of political will,</b></p>

	<p>in early 2020 the National Department of Public Works handed 13 buildings, government buildings to be used for women’s shelters and they handed it over to the Western Cape Province and they handed it over to Gauteng Province and it’s only the Western Cape government which has successfully opened all six of their shelters for women and you have to ask yourself, you know, what is the difference here, why is one province able to open shelters, all their shelters, in the middle of a pandemic and there’s another province who were given the exact same shelters at the same time and they are yet to open a single one. It’s obviously because I am a politician and I am a DA politician, but I mean that is the obvious difference here, it’s a different political leadership, so that when we say that we deliver, we aren’t just thumb-sucking that, it’s by comparative facts that we are basing it on and you know if I go back to accountability as well, I have been on both sides, I have now been a politician and I have been an official in public service and I cannot stress enough on how important it is to have the right officials in the right positions. It is the officials who are the actual implementers, yet we see time after time that there’s no real consequence for officials who waste or who steal public money or who don’t meet their targets, they simply resign and they pop up in another government building, you know, so it’s about getting the very basics of the mandates right so that the wheels can all turn, you know, smoothly. You know you can’t exactly pinpoint where things are going wrong, you know, because something’s going wrong everywhere, but it’s a loss everywhere, targets are not met everywhere, so everybody just needs to get down and focus on their mandate and get that right, get the basics right.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Very, very true. Lastly, as we close out today’s conversation and as we start the new year of 2022 and it is a new beginning, please can you share a few words of inspiration that you’d like to pass onto girls and women in Africa who are listening to the show?</p>
MS ABRAHAMS	<p>So if I can maybe just share, you know, four principles that have worked in my life, you know, it’s in no particular order. One thing that I try to live by is it’s so important to surround yourself with the right people, people who build you up without asking for anything in return and without breaking you down, because you will find you even your own family, your closest friends who don’t always have your best interests at heart, so surround yourself with the right people. The other thing, if you are the smartest person in the room, you’re probably in the wrong room, so find people who stimulate your mind, this one was also a favourite of mine and that the grass is greener where you water it. Throughout my entire working life, you know, you always wonder what if I had done this or what if I applied to this, but that’s just what it is, it’s what if, it’s the work that you put in, where you act is where you’re going to see the results, so the grass is greener where you water it and then, you know, kindness, we have no idea what the next person is going through in their lives and if this pandemic has taught me anything, it’s just to be kinder, to be kinder to the call centre agent who is phoning you for the 100<sup>th</sup> time about your cell phone contract or if it’s the person that’s packing your groceries, you know, kindness costs us nothing, so we should always be mindful of that and you know just to say to you Dr. Malka, thank you for this opportunity, you are also giving up, you know, time in your December leave to push on with these discussions and in looking at, you know, your website and what Womanity stands for, it’s, you know, a great example of real women empowerment, providing a platform for women across all walks of life, from various industries, to actually come together and have</p>

	<b>a conversation. You often see a lot of things that mask and parade as women empowerment but I think what you're doing here is the very essence of what it actually means so thank you so much for this opportunity.</b>
DR. MALKA	Thank you very much for joining us, for those wonderful words of wisdom and inspiration, surrounding yourself with the right people, water the grass and kindness; such an important sentiment and trait to have in the world that we're living in and thank you for your kind words on Womanity, which is one of the things we aim to do showcase women who have achieved and to demonstrate that everything is possible, it's been a pleasure to host you.
MS ABRAHAMS	<b>Thank you so, so much and you know please be safe and to your family, you know, I hope you find time to enjoy them and to rest for 2022.</b>
DR. MALKA	<b>PROGRAMME END</b>