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PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: TSHENOLO MODISE – HIGH COMMISSIONER OF BOTSWANA TO SOUTH AFRICA

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 today is the High Commissioner of Botswana to South Africa, Tshenolo Modise. Almost three decades ago she was part of the first team of diplomats from Botswana in South Africa, circa 1990; she has served as Ambassador for Botswana in the European Union, France, Germany, Italy and the Benelux and more recently as Botswana's High Commissioner to Namibia. Welcome to the show High Commissioner!
HC MODISE	Thank you very much and thank you for having me on your show.
DR. MALKA	It's an absolute pleasure and we look forward to today's conversation. High Commissioner to begin with, you were in South Africa as I mentioned in the introduction, in the early 1990's and that period really gave birth to democracy in South Africa. As someone who has witnessed this important piece of socio-political history and now returns to the country two decades later, how do you experience this transformation and do you consider South Africa to be in a place that you imagined it would have been all those years ago?
HC MODISE	Thank you very much that is a very interesting question that I get often times from people who knew that I was here in the '90's. I think when we came here to set up what was then the Botswana Representative Office, the South African situation was obviously completely different from what it is now. There was an air of hope, there was an air of fear, because for black South Africans it was, actually I must say for all South Africans it was a completely different space that they were moving into and I saw then in the eyes of South Africans, especially black South Africans, a burning desire to take their country to another level. I was actually privileged to attend a training course for what was to be the first group of South African diplomats and all that you saw then was just hope and excitement over what they wanted to do for their country and coming back several decades later, I realised that a lot of that has been achieved, I cannot say that everything has been done perfectly, but I think there is still a lot that has to be done, but there is still a lot that has been. The most important thing that I notice now with the main change is just the pride that has been bestowed on all South Africans. When I was here for instance that time, one would hardly even see a building, let alone a street or a road named after a black person and when I came back thirty years later I realised that I couldn't even recognise some of the streets, I looked for Church Street for instance and I was told it was no more, I looked for Hans Strijdom Street and I was told it was no more and most of those were replaced by South Africans of other races, which to me is quite impressive because that on its own gives the young South Africans hope, you know, or a sense of belonging in the community.
DR. MALKA	What you've said is reminding me of a couple of things, one when we did an interview with former president of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, when I asked her about what was her biggest achievement in the country and she said

	giving hope to a nation in despair and thinking about your words, talking about the sense of pride and identity, I think that is so important in a culture, to be able to own your identity and that we often take simple things like street names for granted, but when you think about it you are exposed to them on a continual basis and that just further imbeds cultural notions.
HC MODISE	Exactly, that is just the way it is and that's just how I felt when I came back to South Africa, yes.
DR. MALKA	High Commissioner can you tell us a few of your career highlights?
HC MODISE	I think one of the main ones really was being appointed to be a part of the group that came to South Africa at a very historic time in the life of South Africa. To me that was something that changed my own life as well, my perspective towards life and made me just appreciate South Africa much better than I had ever done, because coming from a neighbouring country, you know, we have had a lot of interaction with South Africa, both at a personal and at a professional level, but when I came here in my official capacity it was a completely different picture and I appreciate the experience that I gained from that. The other highlight in my life was to be appointed to be as Ambassador to the EU and that was at the age of 45, so you can imagine just what a huge responsibility that was placed on me and not only that, I mean just the sense of pride at my government giving me that kind of responsibility at such an age. So to me that was a highlight and the most important thing also about my first assignment as Ambassador was that this was at the time when relationships between the European Union and the grouping of countries called the African Pacific and Caribbean countries, that was at a time when the relationship between the EU and this group of countries was changing or was moving into another form, so we were involved in the negotiations of what was then called Economic Partnership Agreements, that too was a very interesting part of my life because it was the first time that I was really exposed to serious trade negotiations.
DR. MALKA	And trade makes the world go around.
HC MODISE	Exactly, exactly, you can say that it is more so now than ever before.
DR. MALKA	And fast forwarding to your life and world today, what are some of the objectives you want to achieve in your term as High Commissioner to South Africa?
HC MODISE	The relationship between Botswana and South Africa is historical and it covers almost every facet of our lives. There are certain areas that I really believe that we should really improve on and one of those is just to tap on the huge goodwill, especially amongst the Tswana speaking South Africans, I would like to see that group together with a few professionals from Botswana who work here being a force for Botswana. If I can maybe put it in a little more controversial manner I would say I would like to see that group become what Israel is to any Jewish person wherever they are in the world, you know, where Israel is the North Star, as it were, so I would like to see that happen, it will be quite interesting. I know they are South Africans, they are not Botswana, but it will be interesting to see how they can marshal the fact that they owe their identity to a country called Botswana, to see them do something to demonstrate that, something concrete, something that would lead to the development of the country. So I have been working very closely with the Diaspora, the Botswana Diaspora here and interestingly enough when I convene a meeting of Botswana from Botswana, the Diaspora, they always bring along Tswana speaking South Africans because I think, you know, the two groups cannot separate from one another, so that is quite

	interesting and I think that that is a force that should really be used.
DR. MALKA	Culture is such an intangible element, but it is the glue which holds societies together. The other thing that I wanted to ask you is if you have got any specific programmes in relation to women's development, whether that is from an educational aspect or empowerment?
HC MODISE	You know I have always been of the view that women's issues are really cross cutting, so that every project that you start has a component that can make a lot women better. The most critical thing is just to make sure that projects or programmes are designed such that they do not exclude women, but every project really has a component that can benefit women. So I have been working with other women here, but mainly the projects that I have worked on are projects that I have carried over from Namibia, but most of them are educational. I have been working very closely with the Ambassador of Finland here about programmes that can benefit women, especially in the current areas of artificial intelligence, you know those kind of sciences, so I am working very closely with the Ambassador of Finland to try and make sure that those kind of programmes do not pass the young Botswana women by, so that young Botswana women do benefit and see themselves as direct beneficiaries of whatever the Finnish government is offering in terms of courses in that space.
DR. MALKA	Hearing you speak now reminds me of the fact that the diplomatic core in South Africa is exposed to literally every country that exists and the opportunity space of being able to share knowledge and grow from that must be such a benefit.
HC MODISE	It is a great benefit but you know then the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has really dampened the mood, there hasn't been that much interaction and so I believe that we have lost on a lot of the opportunities that we could have exploited by virtue of the fact that of course we are in South Africa, which holds the largest number of diplomatic missions, but so far I can confirm what you are saying, that you know, we are able to much more than anywhere else in the world, to netowrk and shift some benefits for our individual countries.
DR. MALKA	It's wonderful to hear the cultural trajectory that you are on and joining forces with other countries across the world to strengthen relationships and to pursue agendas.
	AD BREAK
DR. MALKA	Today we're talking to the High Commissioner of Botswana to South Africa, Tshenolo Modise. We would love to receive your comments on Twitter: @WomanityTalk.
DR. MALKA	High Commissioner, being a female leader particularly in Africa, sometimes touches sensitive points, whether it is culture, religion and tradition; in your experience do you feel that female ambassadors or high commissioners are judged differently to their male counterparts?
HC MODISE	Very interesting because, you know, diplomacy in itself is a very conservative discipline, so you can imagine conservatism and sexism sometimes they go together, yes. So I do feel that women ambassadors and high commissioners are really disadvantaged in most instances, to start with, a woman high commissioner or ambassador or a diplomat has to juggle the job of diplomacy with running a family, that one is a fact we cannot run away from it and most of the time I find that it really slows down the progress of women put next to their male counterparts. Right from the beginning of the career, when you join the diplomatic service you put a young man and a young woman next to one another, the young man is bound to progress much faster than the woman, just because society has

	<p>placed certain responsibilities over a woman that makes it very difficult for her to excel in diplomacy, because one diplomacy is about networking, meeting people and long hours and can you imagine a woman spending long hours away from home, especially a woman who has a family. You know she always has to balance between family and that and our male counterparts do not care about these kind of things, they interact, they network, they can spend long, long hours working or interacting with their counterparts and in our job you are judged on your ability to make friends for the country, to get opportunities for the country through those networks and sometimes long hours as I just indicated. So indeed a woman ambassador is judged much differently.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Social and relationship capital is critical to the functioning of your role and as you say, that is an investment of time. Staying with the aspects of gender differences, how would you say the state of gender equality is in Botswana?</p>
HC MODISE	<p>We have started from a very low base I must say and thanks to the advocacy of certain groups in Botswana we have managed to make certain inroads and I think the most important aspect has been the ability to get government to change certain legislations that disadvantaged women and because of that, because of those changes now we are increasingly seeing women moving into spaces that were hitherto or traditionally reserved for men, now we see women into politics much more than we have ever done, we see women becoming priests in churches, something that to us in Botswana is fairly new. We are seeing women becoming chiefs, tribal chiefs, because traditionally that was frowned upon and it never happened, now we are seeing it happening, we are seeing more young girls enrolling in schools, high schools and even in universities and you know since certain practices are really being changed to accommodate women, for instance one of the programmes that we have in Botswana is teenage pregnancies and one of the things that the government has done to ensure that women or young girls are not disadvantaged by this problem is to enable or to allow these young girls to come back to school after confinement. So I think a lot has been achieved but there is still a lot that has to be done, this problem of gender based violence is still prevalent in Botswana as well.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>You've certainly outlined some of the achievements and I think in line with what we've been experiencing from an International Women's Day point of view, the month of March is a period where we acknowledge the achievements that have taken place to help accelerate women's progress, but as you rightly say there is still much that needs to be changed. If you could have a crystal ball or a wish list, what would be the next thing that you'd like to see change to help advance gender equality in Botswana?</p>
HC MODISE	<p>I think it is more education, communication, communication, communication, because you know it is one thing to have good government policies or gender neutral government policies, but it is one thing to actually implement those, because you find that in some cases, in most cases in Botswana we have these beautiful policies but then the way they are implemented, is still being affected by what traditional beliefs, traditional values so that you will find that a policy would allow for instance equal access to learn, but then when you go to a tribal chief in some village in Botswana he always gives preference to a man because in his mind, land is something that has to be owned and held by men as opposed to women. So I think the most important thing is really education and the onus also is on us as women to educate the boy child to appreciate the fact that women deserve equal choices like them.</p>

DR. MALKA	The struggle I always have on this question and issue in particular is the issue of time, the issue of socialisation, that people, particularly older people don't get the concept and the principles immediately because they are burdened by old thinking, which just doesn't allow them to change and become progressive, so I always think that the steps and the actions we are doing now are actually for women of the future, we may not see these changes in our lifetime but hopefully the efforts that we undertake will make their lives better.
HC MODISE	Exactly, that is true, I think that is true, it is education and the efforts that are being made at this point in time that will make a difference in future.
DR. MALKA	High Commissioner you mentioned aspects of leadership change in terms of women being able to become chiefs, women serving as priests, women being part of political systems and being more prevalent in government structures. Building female leadership capacity I think is a very important factor for the future of women to our countries and indeed across the world and when we see women occupying positions in government, serving as heads of state, it is significant for a number of reasons, such as demonstrating the empowerment of women in governance, the fact that women in these positions serve as role models for other women to hopefully follow in their footsteps and that having suitable gender representation is important for policy development as well as policy implementation. We only have two serving female presidents on the continent, Ethiopia and Tanzania; what do you think needs to happen for more countries in Africa to accept a female president?
HC MODISE	I think it boils down to education, education not just to our male counterparts but to us women. You know that invariably the most active in politics is women who really play a leading role at the grass roots, it is women who vote most of the time and I think education should focus on getting us as women to start with, to recognise the fact that we can be led by other women, because it is ingrained in an average woman that a leader has to be a man. I always remember one of my ministers, actually the first foreign minister in Botswana who was a woman and she used to say that you know it is amazing that when you ask women who they would rather vote for in an election, it is not uncommon to hear a woman saying I will vote for that man in the red shirt, not even knowing who the man in the red shirt is, but because he is a man, we tend to believe that he qualifies to be a leader. So to answer your question in short, it is just about education, it is education especially to teach ourselves as women that we can be led by other women and the fact that we have a few women leaders in Africa should really I think motivate us as women in Africa and I think we should talk more about it so that we expose women, even in the most rural of places to the fact that there is a woman leader in a particular country and she is doing a great job.
DR. MALKA	Staying with this view of women in leadership, we know that women have to apply different skills in order to be effective leaders; as a female leader, can you tell us about some of your leadership strategies that you found to be most effective?
HC MODISE	I always go back to our traditional Tswana values of ubuntu and humility. I have never been disadvantaged in my job because of the application of the concept of ubuntu and humility. Ubuntu and humility are disarming to any opponents that one deals with and I always appeal to aspiring young ladies that you know, just be yourself but don't forget the critical values that ground us as Africans and as Botswana in particular, ubuntu and humility in my culture are critical and I have seen that even at an international stage they are still critical and they can help one, they can propel one to greater heights, so that is what I have always applied and I

	have learned that, you know, in every organisation or in everything that I have done, I have always made sure that I bring everybody along, everybody in the organisation always has something to add to whatever you are doing, even the cleaner in the office, they have something to add to the vision, to the mission of an organisation. So from a very early age I have learned to embrace everybody in the organisation and treat them with humility.
DR. MALKA	The qualities that you have just described are ingrained in a lot of our cultures, so it is not something that is foreign to apply, ubuntu, humility, being inclusive are really grounded foundational structures in day-to-day society and the fact that you are able to leverage these attributes is a wonderful insight into leadership.
HC MODISE	Yes that's true because, you know, it's simple things like even using people's names, I have been in situations where at the end of my tour in a certain place, the accolade that I have received was the fact that I used people's names. When I worked with the ACP in Brussels, at the end of my tour one of the gentlemen who used to serve tea in our meetings came to me and said thank you, I will always remember the fact that you always used my first name when you talk to me, you used my name, you know. So it is little things that are imbedded in ubuntu and humility that really make a difference in one's life.
DR. MALKA	Thank you for sharing some of those insights with us.
	AD BREAK
DR. MALKA	Today we're talking to the High Commissioner of Botswana to South Africa, Tshenolo Modise. We would love to receive your comments on Twitter: @WomaniTalk.
DR MALKA	Ambassador we have spoken a lot about culture, we've spoken a lot about leadership and the attributes and values that women bring into the mix, I wanted to ask you about some of the women who have been important agents of change in Botswana with regards to pursuing gender equality.
HC MODISE	I wouldn't mention a single woman but a group of women. I believe that we as women in Botswana, especially professional women, we owe what we have achieved to a group of women who formed an organisation that was called Emang Basadi in 1986. You know 1986 in Botswana it was unheard of to talk about equality of women and this group of women, I think there were about five of them; they formed this organisation and fought very hard to improve the lot of women. They were called all sorts of names, but they persevered, up to this day the organisation is not as popular as it was then, but I still believe that those are the women who really made a significant impact on the situation of women in Botswana, they pushed for the change of laws, they assisted women to fight cases in courts, they did quite a lot really and I think to me, that group of women I salute them and I think I owe what I am to their efforts.
DR. MALKA	Thirty-six years ago is a relatively short timeframe when you've got a women's organisation coming in and driving change, we spoke earlier about the Finish Ambassador and one of the things that she mentioned was that in the 19 th Century, that was when the women's movement helped, which is why we see such great inroads in terms of gender equality with the Nordic countries. So the fact that we are relatively immature in developing our women's movements means that we still have quite a long way to go, but that these coalitions of women who drove change have made that fundamental grounding to pave the way for us.
HC MODISE	Exactly, yes, I agree with you, I think actually they did this at a time when you were just not even popular, at least in Botswana, to even talk about

	equality of women and women being given opportunities similar to those of their male counterparts.
DR. MALKA	One question I want to ask you now is about your personal journey and some of the factors that you consider have contributed to your success. I ask this question to all my guests and interestingly everybody has got a different mix of ingredients, no-one has a universal recipe, which I think is a wonderful thing, so if you can please share with us what you consider to have been some of the factors that have helped contribute to your success?
HC MODISE	I think I should start off by paying tribute or thanking my government for having provided the environment, at least the educational environment for me to achieve what I have managed to achieve. Our education policy at the time when I went to school and up to now actually was to give free education, especially tertiary education to Botswana students and that was open to everybody and the fact that I managed to take advantage of the opportunities that were made available, I think I should in addition to thanking myself or maybe attributing that to my own inner strength and my ability to focus, I think I should thank the government for having made that possible and the other thing that I has really contributed to my achievements, my success and even my personality is my father, strangely enough, I had a father who believed in me. My father thought I was the greatest person, the greatest that ever walked this earth and most of the lessons that he imparted to me and most of the things that he said to me, I realised that you know I held onto them and they have shaped my view and what I have become and I appreciate that because now when I look back I say here is a man telling me what to look out for in life, what to do and what not, even to the day before I got married, the person who talked to me about marriage and what to look out for in marriage and what to avoid, was my father. My father was not necessarily the greatest husband, but the fact that he could talk to me about marriage and then what to look out for meant that he was using his own experience, he knew what disadvantaged a woman in marriage and what made a woman unhappy or whatever and sought to protect his child from that and most of what he said, I tell you has really shaped what I became and just the fact that he believed that I could achieve anything, he always told me that you know, you can be anything that you want to be and I really think that I took that to heart and I attribute a lot of what I am to my dad.
DR. MALKA	Having someone believe in you is really, really important, we see that time and time again because often we have these self-doubts, but when you've got someone who believes in you so wholeheartedly, like your dad, it really does propel that momentum to drive forwards. Thinking back to the past, can you share with us a few of the pivotal moments in your life as you were growing up that have contributed to shaping you into the person you are today?
HC MODISE	I come from a family where there were more boys than girls, I think there are just three girls in my family and six boys and I am the second in the family and for the longest time I was the only girl in the family and I did a lot of work in the house, you know, I cleaned, I did laundry for my brothers and all those kind of things, but my father always you know, pulled me to the side and reminded me that you know this is not what you are going to do for the rest of your life, you should work hard and make sure that you don't do that, even though I was expected to do those things in the family, my dad always took me to the side and told me that, you know, I have to make sure that I do not end up doing that for the rest of my life and for anybody and I think that shaped the way I looked at life, later in life, that you know, you could still do these things, you could still

	do the laundry, the washing and everything and still aim for greater heights, so that in my life I have never felt that being a wife, taking care of children, running the home in any way puts me in a second-class position. I have always believed that you know I could do those things and then as soon as I step out of the house then I can compete at a higher level, because I was made to believe that I can do it. So some of the lessons for me in life was the fact that I grew up in an environment where I was made to actually tend for boys, but still, you know, me being given that message on the side but now, but this is not the end of it, you can still achieve much more than tending for your male counterparts or for your brothers and sisters.
DR. MALKA	That's a fantastic perspective and I think a view and an experience that many, many women contend with, but sometimes they don't escape and they lose themselves and lock themselves into the way that the world has defined them and not going beyond those boundaries and really embracing their own personal ambitions. You've spoken about your dad, who sounds like he was a wonderful, wonderful man; can you tell us about some of the strong women in your life.
HC MODISE	I think I have met strong women at different stages of my life, from the time I was growing up and then maybe going to school and even in my career. When I joined the foreign service in Botswana, our minister was a woman, a very strong woman who had very strong beliefs in terms of what to do and what not to do and a woman who sought to recreate us in her image, if I may say to be controversial, I found her to be the strongest woman that I have ever had to deal with from a professional point of view. She is now 100 years old and is still in Botswana, yes I am telling you she is still around and getting stronger, so she told us the importance of working hard professionally and keeping healthy and I salute her because when she told us about what to eat, what not to eat, what to do to exercise and things like that to stay strong, we thought it was you know just a jest, but she is the embodiment of that because she is now 100 years old, still has a sharp mind and getting strong, but that was very powerful in Botswana who I really look up to up to this moment.
DR. MALKA	And lastly, as we close out our conversation today, can you use this platform to share a few words of inspiration or motivation for girls and women in the continent that are listening to us?
HC MODISE	I will say to the young girls out there, all I can say is that you can make it, yes you can do it, you can make it, it just takes determination and a lot of focus and of course humility and ubuntu, you know, but the sky is blue as I said, you know, it can be done. Gone are the days when women were confined to the kitchen or to the home, that is long, long, long gone and I think every young lady should know that they can do anything that they wish to do and they should not allow anybody to put them down. That was the lesson that my father gave me, he told me that never allow anybody to put you down, because you are great, every young girl out there is great and can achieve a lot, they should not allow anybody to put the down, it can be done.
DR. MALKA	Thank you for that wonderful message, it's been a pleasure to host you, thanks for joining us.
HC MODISE	Thank you very much, thanks.
	PROGRAMME END