

Luciano Benetton takes part in the World Businesswomen Club's Forum, in Tokyo

WOMEN ARE THE FUTURE OF BUSINESS

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OF BENETTON.

Tokyo, 8th April 1999. *"I am convinced that the role reserved for women in the new millennium, both at work and in life, will be ever more adapted to their great capabilities, because they are more in touch with the reality of our times and, at the same time, are more conscious of the future"*: it was with these words that Luciano Benetton, president of the Benetton Group concluded his speech at the 1999 World Businesswomen's Forum, organised by the Tokyo Chamber of Commerce, which was today held at the New Otani Hotel and attended also by the Crown Princess Masako and the Prime Minister of Japan Keizo Obuchi. Among the other participants were Nobuyuki Idei, president of Sony, Yoshiharu Fukuhara, president of Shiseido and Christie Hefner, President of Playboy Enterprises.

In front of about a thousand women, who are members of the Tokyo Businesswomen's Club, Luciano Benetton recalled how even today, all over the world, it is difficult for women to freely choose a role different from the one society has traditionally allocated to them over the centuries. In Italy, for example, women managers in a large-scale industry represent little more than 3% of the total. Only 3.3% of senior managers in daily newspapers and 7% of head physicians in hospitals are women. *"The matter is highly topical"*, emphasised Benetton, *"one only needs to think about the heated debate currently going on in Italy on a proposed parliamentary bill aimed at adopting legal measures to promote equal access to political life for both men and women, and about female candidates put forward for the Presidency of the Republic for the first time"*.

The experience of the Benetton Group, also due to the presence of a woman, Giuliana Benetton, among its founders, has shown that what counts, in both life and work, are the human and professional capabilities of individuals, be they men or women. *"When we first started out in business, almost 35 years ago"* recalled Benetton, *"it was our common passion for work that put us on a truly equal footing. Each of us, without discrimination, chose the activity sector that reflected our attitudes since childhood"*.

Today, Benetton is a young group, in which almost half of the total workforce is made up of women. Women are present in a significant number in many strategic areas of the company: in the sales, the quality control, the legal affairs, marketing and in the communications' departments. They represent more than 10% of senior management and 15% of middle management.

Women's strong enterprising spirit has also helped to spread the entrepreneurial spirit, one of the cornerstones of the Benetton business culture, at all levels. There is also a very significant female presence in its network of commercial partners which, with 7000 stores throughout the world, is a unique example of diffuse entrepreneurial activity.

With regard to the future, Luciano Benetton stressed how the task of business people is becoming even more complex, especially due to the continual change, a feature of the modern day working environment. But he also reaffirmed his great faith in women who, *"often better than us men, are capable of organising themselves, of handling several things simultaneously and of working in a team. They also have more warmth, more patience, are more prepared to listen and to understand their colleagues and to recognise their potential"*. In the twenty-first century, more than ever before, success will go to business people who still have the desire to learn: who are open to what experience and relationships with the world have to teach.