



Speech of **Laurence Beldowski**,
Managing Director, Communication
& Entreprise,
(Palais de Tokyo -
Thursday, 4th February, 2016)

Minister,
ladies and gentlemen, members of the network and members of our association,

Thank you all for joining us today. And thank you also to *le Palais de Tokyo* [The Tokyo Palace] for hosting us so well.

Minister, we are particularly grateful for your presence with us, and proud that you have chosen to add your support and sponsorship to our *No More Clichés* [No More Sexist Stereotypes] campaign.

We are together here today to further the important aim of equality between women and men.

Today, *Toutes Femmes Toutes Communicantes* [the association's network of women communication professionals], and therefore 'Communication & Entreprise', have taken a significant step forward.

The purpose of our *No More Clichés* campaign is to bring together all the women and men who recognise that gender stereotypes have a toxic effect on society. And also to gather all those who believe in the power of concerted efforts and action, because this campaign, ladies and gentlemen, is meant for all of us.

Let me begin by introducing the colleagues who form the Steering Committee of *Toutes Femmes Toutes Communicantes*:

Edith Lavirotte, one of the joint network chairs, Céline Mas, Judith Vieille, Emmanuelle Mioux, Céline Lebail, Michèle Buinet, Anne Lebour, Zohre Poulet, and also Lisa Fayet from Communication & Entreprise. All of these women have contributed strongly to both the development and implementation of the network's strategy. Thank you also to Cécile Chapel for her ongoing inspiration, Nathalie Debray, the network's founder, and to Gaëlle Philippart, my assistant, who has overseen communications. Please could we give them all a round of applause.

Our network started life almost four years ago, born of a strong desire to foster support, self-confidence, and mutual encouragement; with the aim of being better equipped to overcome barriers and smash through that still-present glass ceiling.

We very quickly saw that we had to take our values and beliefs beyond simply networking and socialising. 2014 and 2015 therefore saw the development and launch of our charter, which is based on three commitments:

Sharing experience;
Realising potential; and
Encouraging the sector to act responsibly

The first two of these commitments have been at the heart of our network's activities over the last four years:

We have all benefited hugely from our meetings and the experiences they have brought us. We have gained in confidence, allowing the network to thrive in a virtuous circle of goodwill, shared fun and laughter, and informative exchanges. I can honestly say our expertise has been shared far and wide!

Right at the start, we knew that allowing people to realise their potential was a vital area! And the means to recognise our untapped potential? Through coaching, mentoring and similar approaches; something that has significantly boosted the women in our network!

Above all, we have helped them to:

- overcome the male-centric culture that has dominated thinking since the mists of time,
- and to progress within organisations, because that's something women have both the capacity and the right to do!

All the research findings agree: companies gain in both productivity and innovation when they embrace gender diversity!

As you yourself put it so well, Minister: "There is no skill you can't master, but you have to believe you can", and the women in this network most certainly do believe they can!

So, we were left with only the development and propagation of the last commitment in our charter: to encourage the sector to act responsibly!

To see the capacities of women recognised in the media, where they have consistently been represented poorly.

And to ensure that an image of women based on respect characterises all the communications produced by the sector.

Communications campaigns feed organisations and the media, and they nourish our society.

By formally committing ourselves to the subject of women and gender stereotypes, something that affects the entire communications ecosystem, 'Communication & Enterprise' is continuing its efforts to advocate responsible communication.

This year, we questioned the place of communication in society. What is our role as professional communicators?

Communication is a tool that transforms societies; it enables us to work together to achieve social change; so we want to harness the power of the networks that 'Toutes Femmes Toutes Communicantes' and 'Communication & Enterprise' represent, in the service of a major change for the better: the place of women in society.

Isn't it the case that companies that exploit gender stereotyping prefer publicity, even when it's bad publicity, to their own reputations? And don't some campaigns adopt an approach of "never mind the quality; look at the results."?

The Secretary of State for Women's team have drawn this sorry conclusion: behaviour can't be changed until attitudes evolve! How do we make people realise that gender stereotypes are deep-rooted in our society? And, in particular, they persist because they emanate from the communication sector and the media. Advertising is an easy scapegoat, of course, but we need to think carefully about other channels of communication too: annual reports, websites, company newsletters, and so on; they are most definitely not blameless!

So it is our essential duty to make every man and woman in our sector aware of the responsibility that they themselves need to bear!

Thank you to Louise Beveridge, who inspired us to make this film, which clearly highlights the problems that exist in communication with the image of women.

And so, this is how the film, "*No More Clichés*", came into being: out of our determination to expose something that just doesn't sit right with us.

To show that the issue is still as relevant today,

And it most certainly is! There is still a huge amount to do!

Our real desire is to encourage our communication professionals to take responsibility, to allow them to identify sexist stereotypes, and also, because the use of humour does not mean that anything goes, to encourage them in the direction of new types of creativity.

Of course, as you're about to see, our film challenges those who think that this is an issue of the past. Actually, far beyond its relevance for professional communicators, it shows that we are ALL concerned by the subject matter; that the siren voices of gender stereotypes are EVERYWHERE, hidden in different forms, permeating our everyday lives.

Like a common currency that we all adopt, we give them credence by making use of them; and, in so doing, we provide the oxygen that sustains them.

Stereotypes have a much greater toxicity than this innocuous word might suggest. They drive mindless judgements, social role modelling, and wrong behaviour. They shackle and sentence women to the clearly defined roles that have been theirs since time immemorial.

To fight these stereotypes brings benefits for society because ultimately they destroy value. They maintain the *status quo* in organisations and undermine confidence.

How do we change behaviour without changing attitudes? It is simply not possible! And THAT, Minister, is exactly the point of our teams meeting here today.

As professional communicators, we give our society words, images and symbols that broadcast information, offer benchmarks, and provide meaning and clarification.

So, the way that we practice in our profession is not something that is neutral; it has an influence on society and on mind sets.

We are unscramblers of messages and act as facilitators.

So, let us commit ourselves to the task of using all our expertise to drive a change in behaviour and in the way that women are perceived.

Finally and most importantly, what we propose tonight is much more than the launch of a short film. It is the start of a long campaign that is, above all, a participative campaign. Our committee will now present to you a series of actions we have drawn up that will enable us to act on this together.

I want, now, to ask each and every one of you to contribute to this project in your own way, at your own level. Take on a role as an active player, a promoter, or an ambassador. And let us, together, drive the message that *No More Clichés* conveys throughout our companies and society as a whole!