

MICHELLE YEOH

It is good to have Michelle Yeoh on your side in a fight, for the former Miss Malaysia punches far above the weight of a stereotypical beauty queen. The star of the multiple Academy Award-winning film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* — renowned for performing her own stunts — has been ranked as the greatest action heroine of all time. And she far exceeded the typical role of a Bond girl in *Tomorrow Never Dies*, that her co-star, Pierce Brosnan, called her “a female James Bond”.

So it is thoroughly good news that she has taken up the battle for sustainable and safe transport, working with UNEP and the FIA Foundation in two important campaigns. The ‘50by50 Initiative’ — in which they are joined by the International Energy Agency and the International Transport Forum — aims to reduce the fuel consumption per kilometre of the world’s car fleet by 50 per cent by 2050. And ‘Share the Road’, with the International Road Assessment Programme, presses for ten per cent of road building investment to be devoted to sustainability and safety features, such as encouraging walking and cycling.

“Safe mobility should be seen as a basic human right, like access to clean drinking water”, she told *Our Planet*. “It is a basic requirement to help millions improve their life chances and climb out of poverty.”

I call for a Decade
for Road Safety 2020-2030

Together we can save millions of lives

Michelle Yeoh

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The Campaign for Global Road Safety

Born Yeoh Choo-Kheng, to a prominent Chinese family in the old tin mining city of Ipoh, Malaysia, 47 years ago, she says she has witnessed how “people in developing countries have had to cope with dramatic changes to transport systems over the past twenty to thirty years”, and adds: “It is still a process that is changing rapidly.” The world’s car fleet is expected to triple by 2050, and 80 per cent of that growth is forecast for developing countries.

This lends great urgency to the 50by50 Initiative which aims at preventing the emission of two gigatons of carbon dioxide, roughly half the entire current emissions of the European Union. “With climate change such a vital issue, this is an effort to help policymakers and the car industry reduce the impact of the huge increase in the number of cars by improving fuel economy and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.”

But, she adds, she is “most passionate” about road safety. “Every thirty seconds another child dies or is seriously injured. More than four in every five of those killed in road traffic crashes live in middle and low-income countries, and a rise of more than 80 per cent in road deaths in these countries by 2020 is predicted.

“We are facing a problem of epidemic proportions and — in addition to the tragic human cost — it is undermining our development efforts. The World Bank recently estimated that developing countries lose approximately \$100 billion every year due to road crashes — roughly equal to the amount of all development aid.”

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Yeoh —

who has been honoured as a Dato (roughly equivalent to a British knighthood) in Malaysia, and has been awarded as a Knight of the Legion of Honour in France — goes on: “What makes it even worse is that we have the means to stop this, to save lives, and yet nothing is being done. What stays with me from all my journeys is what I have seen of the terrible impact on people’s lives when policymakers get it wrong, or ignore the problem. The road deaths epidemic could be tackled but it needs the world’s attention to be focused on it. We need to start shouting.”

She has also long been interested in environmental issues — she is an ambassador for the Save China’s Tigers project — and sees road safety as “a symptom of the wider sustainability problem” adding: “The chances are that an unsafe road is also a road that is not encouraging non-car users, cyclists or pedestrians.” So she is particularly enthusiastic about the ‘Share the Road’ campaign as an attempt to “ensure that the poor and the vulnerable who will never own a car still have a fair and safe stake in our transport system.” G.L.