

Opening Session
Michelle Yeoh, Global Ambassador for the Make Roads Safe campaign
First Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety

Good morning. I am tremendously honoured to be here as the Global Ambassador for the Make Roads Safe Campaign. We've campaigned hard, all across the world, to make this Ministerial Conference a reality. And I very much appreciate this opportunity to speak to you, to give a voice to all the voiceless victims I've met.

I've been given five minutes to speak with you. So as we say in the movie business, I'm going to "cut to the chase", and come right to the point.

In my line of work, as an actress, I get to run across roof tops, jumping out of buildings, dodging cars and trucks, defeating all kinds of villains.

But it's all make-believe. At the scene, the director yells cut, and we all go home, safe and sound to do it again the next day.

We entertain people. And we make it seem as if we're saving people's lives.

But you – the ministers in this room – the important leaders of government – you can be the real heroes. Because you have the power to actually save people's lives, and to make a difference in the world, and to have a far greater impact than an actress, who makes believe she can do it, in front of the cameras.

For the past two years, I've travelled around the world, and seen the impact that the smallest little changes in road safety – and roadway initiatives - can have on people's lives.

These things are not hugely expensive. They don't require years of study. But they will pay an economic return to all of us – in every country – for the lives they save, and the tragedies and sadness they avert.

I'm talking about things like helmet laws, driver awareness campaigns, roadway designs and initiatives that make it safer for our children to do something as simple as crossing the street, to go to school.

That is why this Ministerial Conference is so important – and why your work, and your attendance here, is so very critical.

What stays with me from my trips around the world is what I've seen of the terrible impact on people's lives when policy makers get it wrong, or ignore the problem, or decide it's too expensive or difficult to fix.

This road death catastrophe is a silent epidemic – a quiet, unnecessary killer of your citizens and their children - and we all need to start shouting.

Together, as we heard from Lord Robertson, we have the knowledge, and the road safety vaccines, to save five million lives.

What is needed now is the political will and the determination to take our call for a Decade of Action for Road Safety to the United Nations, and to work together to make road safety a global priority.

It's my hope, my wish, my dream, that we will be able to look back at this Moscow Conference in five years, and be proud of what we have achieved, based on the changes you have started to put in place this week.

That's the real act of heroism. That's the change and reality only you can accomplish.

It's the difference between being a movie actress - someone like me, who entertains the audience for two hours...

Or being someone like you – someone who has the courage, and the power to act on the world stage, to save people's lives, and change the destiny of your citizens, and your children, forever.

Today, at this historic conference in Moscow, the stage has been set. We have a room filled with powerful, compassionate people who have been called on to be heroes.

The stage is set. We have the lights. We have the cameras. And as they say in my world, now it's time for action.

On behalf of all the lives you will save, I thank you.