

# Standing up for animals

## Fruno and friends go all out to increase awareness on animal-saving campaigns

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**A**SHLEY Fruno is an animal lover of extremes. The all-powerful chief campaigner of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) Asia-Pacific devises animal-saving campaigns so controversial that they make the conservative stop and stare.

Her toughest job was perhaps wearing a tiny yellow bikini in the blistering winter of Vancouver — when the temperature dipped to as low as -39°C, just to urge one company to raise its animal-care standards.

Not just that. When the going gets tough (for nude campaigners) in Kuala Lumpur, the tough Fruno gets going — she redesigned her “Go Green” campaign creatively for Malaysia by wrapping herself in nothing but lettuce.

But ask her about her nude PETA campaigns and chances are the passionate animal activist will tell you that nudity will always make her blush.

“Going naked — or semi-naked — in public is always embarrassing, and sometimes painful when it’s extremely cold,” Fruno con-

fessed when relating her personal experiences. “But it’s simply nothing compared to what the animals go through.”

Only the sky is the limit for her creative animal campaigns. “We try to use every available outlet to speak up for animals, which voices go unheard,” she said. “We believe that everyone should be free to use their own words, talents, actions and bodies to make social statements and by doing so, help animals.”

Having said that, the Canadian beauty, who calls Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur her second home these days, is culturally sensitive. “Cultural sensitivity is something that PETA considers when planning a protest or a celebrity campaign,” Fruno said about her ongoing campaigns for Malaysia.

“The trick is finding something that’s eye-catching and has just enough shock value to make people pay attention to the message, without being disrespectful to local culture.”

Describing Malaysians as compassionate, she added, “I think our ‘Go Green’ protest was effective in this approach — we were able to make the campaign just

provocative and fun enough to get people interested, without offending anyone. Most importantly, we were successful in spreading the message that going vegetarian is the best thing you can do for your own health, the environment and of course the animals.”

Recently, Fruno and her cohorts took their green campaign one notch higher with their beautiful ‘PETA Mermaids Stick Up For Fish’ movement in Jalan Bukit Bintang, urging Malaysians to save fish by becoming vegetarians.

Well, no nudity involved. But four lovely mermaids including Malaysian theatre personality Davina Goh, braved the scorching afternoon heat and lay down on a fish net spread across the busy road in front of Maybank for about an hour — holding signs that read ‘Try to Relate to Who’s On Your Plate’.

Defending PETA’s unconventional move in hyping up their animal rescue efforts, Fruno explained, “In this 24-hour news-cycle world, we have found that our racier actions are sometimes the best way to get people to pay attention to what we are saying



**Salad woman:** Fruno redesigned her “Go Green” campaign by wrapping herself in nothing but lettuce in Bukit Bintang. — filepic

about the plight of animals."

Just for the record, among top Hollywood celebrities who have starred in racy PETA ads are Maggie Q, Charlize Theron, Anna Nicole Smith and Pamela Anderson.

Fruno's dedication to saving animals started when she was just seven – after she found a vein in her chicken nuggets.

"I never before realised that the animals on my neighbours' farms that fascinated me so much were the same as the ones on my plate," she recollected.

"At that point, I began to cut meat out of my diet and went vegetarian for good at 13. Later, after learning about animals' suffering in the dairy and egg industries, I went vegan."

Her lifelong missions are engraved in four gorgeous body

art images.

"My first tattoo is a rabbit, which is the international recognised 'cruelty free' symbol, which means no animal testing. The second one is the word 'vegan' because the word – which to me, means that I live my life to be the most compassionate person I can be – is so important to me," she said with quiet conviction.

"The third, which I got just before I moved to Asia to work for PETA, is a tansy flower, the flower of courage. It serves as a reminder that I should never let being afraid stop me from doing what is right or from speaking out against injustices.

"The fourth, which is the flower of compassion (purple all spice) intertwined with a bird cage with a bird being released, symbolises animal liberation."



**Save animals:** Fruno assisting her colleague (in sheep costume) at the protest against the live export of sheep from Australia at the Australian High Commission in Kuala Lumpur. – filepic