



On the occasion of the International Year of Youth, UN Youth Champion, American actress and singer Monique Coleman, best known for her role in the “High School Musical” movies, visited Belgium from 3 to 7 June as part of her “Gimme MO” world tour to give a voice to young people.

Upon arrival in Belgium, Monique immediately traveled to Antwerp, a city in which 30% of the population is younger than 25 and which currently bears the title of European Youth Capital of 2011. In the framework of the first European project around urban arts called ‘Urban Exchange around the Sea’ involving young dancers and coaches from Antwerp, Amsterdam, Utrecht and Liverpool, she enthusiastically danced with young professionals in a series of flashmobs ([hyperlink to video](#)) that took place at different hot spots across the town

As official guest of the city of Antwerp, Monique met with the Vice-Mayor for Youth Leen Verbist and, based on her experiences shared with other youth around the world, had an exchange of views with young artists and engaged with them on their life experiences and aspirations. While visiting Antwerp she also had lively discussions with students from both primary school de Wereldreiziger and secondary school Leonardo Lyceum on UN related projects and a diversity of issues such as youth and the environment, self-esteem, etc.

Her message to young people in Belgium and everywhere around the world is that “you don’t have to try to change the world, everyday that you wake up and you live your life, you are already a part of a world that is constantly changing. All I ask of young people is to be true to who they are, figure out who you are, and hold on to who you really are.”

Monique decided to take part in this world tour to share her knowledge and passion on matters close to her heart such as the Millennium Development Goals, and more specifically the

empowerment of women and girls and the environmental issues. At the opening of a vernissage of 8 installations representing the 8 MDGs by 40 students from the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Visuels de La Cambre as part of the Millenium Film Festival, Monique said "I'm excited to support films that promote the MDGs because I believe that entertainment is a powerful way to spread important messages." On June 5<sup>th</sup> Monique had the opportunity to play memory games with children and help them create and add their self made trees to panels on the UN stand at the World Environment Day festival « La Fête de l'Environnement » in the Parc du Cinquanteaire in Brussels.

*Monique Coleman was appointed the first ever Youth Champion by the UN on 16 November 2010 to raise awareness of the challenges facing young people.*