



Known to most of the world as Taylor McKessie in Disney’s High School Musical, American actress Monique Coleman has an impressive CV. After this year she can add first-ever UN [“Youth Champion”](#) for the International Year of Youth, a title bestowed on her by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at a [press conference](#) on 16 November 2010. Travelling around the world ever since, she has been working to realize dialogue and mutual understanding, the theme of this International Year of Youth. When [visiting Belgium](#) we managed to ask this very busy young woman a few questions.

*What has been your most rewarding experience so far as the UN Youth Champion?*

It's very difficult to choose one particular experience to highlight as "most" rewarding! I will say that the global tour has changed my life and impacted me in ways I couldn't have expected. Visiting Kakuma Refugee camp in Kenya, meeting with girls who were rescued from human trafficking in Manila, singing with orphaned youth in Jakarta, and listening to beautiful presentations of refugee youth in Pretoria are among the experiences that will remain in my heart long after this trip is over. As Youth Champion, I've been able to speak with youth and hear how they experience the world. The innate wisdom, creativity, ingenuity, and intelligence that I've witnessed from youth gives me hope that they are fully capable of contributing to

solving the worlds problems. Giving youth a safe space to be themselves and discover their worth is probably the most rewarding aspect of being Youth Champion.

*What must the UN do to live up to Ban Ki-moon's aspiration that youth should be allowed the possibility to participate in decision-making on local, national and global levels?*

We must put actions to those aspirations and as the Nike slogan suggested Just Do It! I believe that the UN is doing amazing work on behalf of youth, but more can always be done. Inviting more youth to attend meetings, keeping them informed with accurate information, and providing tangible ways for them to get involved are some steps that can allow further participation. Above all, the UN must utilize the assets of youth: idealism, energy, and creativity. What youth lack in experience, they make up for in passion. I think we need to apply some new ideas to old problems and give young people a chance to express themselves in the meetings where it counts.

*As young governors at the UN, how can we contribute to the process of making the UN more sensitive to youth issues? □*

It appears that the UN is already sensitive to youth issues, and as young governors, I believe you are an example of that. I think the best thing that you can do is to be a bridge between the UN and the young people that need to be reached. Use your voices to speak on behalf of those who don't yet have theirs, and don't be afraid to present new ideas or thoughts. The reason you came to the UN in the first place was because you wanted to make a difference in the world, so speak up....think creatively, and use your inside perspective to educate and empower other young people.

*(Interview with Monique for [Internal Voices](#) , the UN Interns' Magazine)*

Links to online galleries visit Belgium.

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