December 2, 2009 — Luis Gallegos, Ecuadorian Ambassador to the United States and Honorary Chair of Global Universal Design Commission, Inc. (“GUDC”), was recognized by the Greater Washington Hispanic Chamber of Commerce for his activism in the defense and promotion of human rights. This distinction, the first to be awarded by the Chamber to a foreign ambassador, highlights Gallegos’ extraordinary international work for the rights of persons living with disabilities.

“We are thrilled that Ambassador Gallegos has been recognized for his enduring commitment to bettering the lives of persons living with disabilities,” expressed Peter Blanck, Chair of GUDC, who is also Chairman of the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University. “His knowledge and influence, as well as the creativity and enthusiasm he injects into his work have made, and continue to make, a remarkable impact worldwide.” In addition to his involvement in GUDC, Gallegos is the former Vice-Chair of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, and a member of the United Nations Committee against Torture, a body of 10 independent experts that monitors the implementation of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment by its State parties.

Graciously receiving this distinction, Ambassador Gallegos stressed the need to promote greater respect for human rights, placing special emphasis on the need to protect the rights of those in our societies who are most vulnerable, such as women, children, minorities and those living with disabilities. “Real change in each of our minds and hearts is necessary if we are to truly enjoy human rights; societies of the world must make these changes and respect the fundamental rights of human beings,” said the Ecuadorian diplomat.
GUDC, a New York not-for-profit corporation, was established to promote the understanding and use of universal design (“UD”) in the design and development of buildings, products and environments to be useable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation, retrofitting or specialized design. GUDC is leading a voluntary consensus standards development process to provide an objective system of measurement to evaluate the level of adoption of UD standards in the built environment. Through public education, training and technical assistance activities, GUDC will increase awareness, understanding and application of UD principles.

To learn more about GUDC, visit the website at www.globaluniversaldesign.org.