



ADA Live!

Episode 74: Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Global Perspective with Ambassador Luis Gallegos of Ecuador

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Speaker: Ambassador Luis Gallegos , Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary,
Permanent Representative of Ecuador to the United Nations in New York

Host: Peter Blanck, Chairman - Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University

Luis Gallegos: Hi, I am Ambassador Luis Gallegos and you are listening to ADA live.

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Peter Blanck: "Good afternoon, on behalf of the Southeast ADA Center and the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University and the ADA National Network. Welcome to episode 74 of ADA live.

Hello everybody, my name's Peter Blanck. I'm a university professor and chairman of the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University. Before we move on to the listening audience, you may submit your questions about the ADA at anytime to adalive.org and today we have a very special guest for this episode of ADA live. Ambassador Luis Gallegos; Lawyer, Ambassador, extraordinary permanent representative of Ecuador to the United Nations in New York. And it's a great honor Ambassador to have you with us. We're so delighted to have you on the show today

Luis Gallegos: Peter, thank you very much and it's an honor for me and a pleasure, to be with you and the team in this very important program.

Peter Blanck: Thank you Ambassador, and you of course have a story diplomatic career, before you've working in New York. On this round, you were of course Ecuador's permanent representative to the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. You served as ambassador to the United States for many years, from 2005 to 2011. Two previous terms as Ecuador's permanent representative to the United Nations in New York, as well as serving as ambassador to Australia and El Salvador. And probably more than much more than most people do in a lifetime, just there alone. But you have a, an important and unique worldwide view. You've made it your life's passion to work with and support and help protect people with disabilities, over the life course and across the globe. And I thought we'd begin Ambassador, by asking you; what do you see as the successes and challenges and opportunities for people with disabilities that have emerged across the globe in all the important work you have done over the years? Well, folks, if you have any questions about this episode and the topic of disability employment, please submit your questions online at any time at www.adalive.org or call the Southeast ADA Center at 404-541-9001. "ADA Live" is available in a variety of formats. You may find archives, transcripts, and resources at adalive.org.

Luis Gallegos: Thank you very much Peter for that, very beautiful and nice introduction. And I thank you, for the concept you've just said. It has been, a very important issue in my life and my family's life, how we can protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities, around the world? Since I was engaged as chairman of the working group that drafted the United Nations Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. Done from 2002 to 2005. We'll talk about how this would develop. But fundamentally I think it was the result of decades of work of the leaders of the disability community that made this possible. We have now an International Legislation, on issues of disability that was approved by the general assembly in 2006, so we have more than a decade of the CRPD working.

Peter Blanck: What are the opportunities?

Luis Gallegos: I think that it is now a dramatic on a national and international agenda. We have a 180 States, parties of the United nations. Out of 193 we only have 13 more to go to make it a universal convention. On those rights. There are always challenges in inclusion of persons with disabilities that I think are, what we should look into in the near future. We've advanced important steps in this concept. But I think the roadmap is laid out and it should be also one of the endeavors of worldwide society, to having collusive to have an inclusive and holistic society as we would like all of us in mankind to have.

Peter Blanck: Well, thank you ambassador, and of course, in addition to that important work, we have worked together with you as the honorary chairman of the Global Universal Design Commission, the GUDC. Which goal is to promote understanding and inclusion of people with disabilities into all aspects of society, just as you were talking about with regard to the UN Convention. What do you see as the most critical aspects of your work? Bridging the work between the Universal Design Movement, Global Universal Design, and of course the principles of the UN convention.

Luis Gallegos: I remember that when we negotiated the convention, we had to define what Universal Design was. And fundamentally we came up with a design of products, environments, programs and services to be, to be usable by all peoples, to the greatest extent possible. Now I, I'd like to answer your question either by giving you my thoughts on this issue, using your question as a basis.

You're either born with a disability or you acquire it during your life by accident, by its sickness, by war, by many other causes. But to me as you age, we all will be disabled in some way or the other. Therefore, Universal Design is what is conceived as an adaptive design for all of our uses in humankind. If you make a product and it's designed for the use of persons with extreme disability or persons that, that have difficulties in any way, you're designing it for the rest of the population.

And I think that should be ingrained in how we have, we make buildings, how we make roads, how we have the urban settings, the rural settings and how we have our

educational system. And our medical facilities, with this allocation, so I think that it's a great challenge. To have societies adapt their everyday life to these capabilities to make their societies inclusive to all persons who have any type of disability.

Peter Blanck: What do you see Ambassador as the challenges we face today, perhaps in furthering the advancement of the UN convention in terms of terrific issues faced around the world in terms of climate change, poverty, migration, immigration? Do you see a connection across all those venues?

Luis Gallegos: When you have an international problem like climate change which goes beyond borders. You have to look for international solutions because national solutions in one's own territory are not enough.

These affect human beings. They don't, not only affect the extreme cases of climate to duration, the changes are creating migratory patterns of persons who are leaving their countries because they cannot survive under the traditional conditions. The issue therefore is how persons with disabilities are affected by climate change? How they will be affected by climate change, as we move into a sequence, patterns that are more graver in the world, how persons with disabilities are affected by those migratory patterns as they become migrants or they become refugees?

Making a distinction that migrants normally are persons who cross borders in order to have a better life and work. And work in other societies while refugees are fleeing for their lives. You have the, the issues of peace and when I say peace and war in the sense you of course have persons who are killed and persons who are made disabled by war.

I think that that is a reality in the world and we have to be very careful of how this violence is an antecedent to I can underline terrorism. Terrorism causes many deaths, but it causes much more persons with disabilities. You have the issue of weapons, like the personal mines, landmines that remain and continue to remain. A huge number of persons every year as they were deposited in countries that were in conflict and have not been removed or can't be removed. Because of the reality of the terrain and so on. So you have many issues that have to be dealt with in a transversal way in which we look at these problems

from a multidimensional, multidisciplinary capability in order to find solutions and where, where we can't find them on the basis of an international legislation like the CRPD. And where we should look into the solutions as a commonality of mankind and of the nation States that formed the United nations.

Peter Blanck: Well, and ambassador, you of course come from an amazing country, Ecuador, from its beaches to mountains, to Amazon, to Galapagos islands. What would you say on a personal level in terms of Ecuador, can you illustrate these connections in terms of, as you use the example climate change, people with disabilities, even how it may affect the nature of the products that Ecuador may buy or export?

Luis Gallegos: Well, Peter, as you know, and you've visited us in Ecuador and you met the president of Ecuador, the president of Ecuador, Mr. Lenin Moreno is a person in a wheelchair. He became a wheelchair user after an assault, which hinders him because of a gunshot. Mr. Moreno has been able to establish in Ecuador in the last decade when he was vice president and now president a policy for disability as a national endeavor.

I think we've advanced very well in many cases, but we have to acknowledge that the last reports on climate change, for example, state that countries like Ecuador will no longer be able to cultivate coffee or cocoa beans for chocolate if the actual deterioration of climate continues because the varieties of these plants will no longer substitute under the climate change. That means that hundreds of thousands of people will not have jobs and those people, when I talk about jobs, I also talk about the impact on families.

When you have a flooding or you have deterioration of your snowcap mountains, which can create the conditionalities for flooding, how does this affect people with disabilities? We have, we have experienced in Ecuador as a unique case in which we can position by satellite persons with disabilities in our coastal regions and move them inland.

If we have a tsunami alert, they are moved by their communities or individually by their families or by the IDM forces of Ecuador. But we have in place programs and strategic dealings with civil society in order to move persons inland. And also we have a country

that has volcanoes and therefore has earthquakes in which we also have designed programs for cases of eruptions.

I think that all the issues that have to deal with it with the human person, in reality without a distinction if they are disabled or not have to be taken into consideration in order to have an integral program for persons with disabilities. And of course as they are seeing as a vulnerable, we in Ecuador definable their blue pea, fundamentally women in children in disability and indigenous and our indigenous populations. So they are prioritized in the treatment that government has to give them and the treatment society has to give them in these cases.

Peter Blanck: Well that's fascinating ambassador. And at this point I'd like to just remind our listening audience that if you have any questions about this month topic or any of our other ADA live topics, please submit your questions at (404) 541-9001 that's the telephone number (404) 454-1900 one or through our website www.adalive.org.org let's pause for a word from our featured organization

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Voice Over Announcement: The Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. The CRPD was adopted by the general assembly of the United nations by resolution 61 one o'six on December 13th, 2006. It came into force on May 3rd, 2008, on its 20th ratification. The convention follows decades of work by the United nations to change attitudes and approaches to people with disability. It takes to a new height movement from viewing people with disabilities as objects of charity, medical treatment and social protection towards viewing people with disabilities as subjects with rights who are capable of claiming those rights and making decisions for their lives based on their free and informed consent. As well as being active members of society.

The convention is intended as a human rights instrument with an explicit social development dimension. It adopts a broad categorization of persons with disabilities and reaffirms that all persons with all types of disabilities must enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms. It clarifies and qualifies how all categories of rights apply to

people with disabilities and identifies areas where adaptations have to be made for people with disabilities to effectively exercise their rights and areas where the rights had been violated and where protection of rights must be reinforced.

Article 40 of the convention stipulates the States parties shall meet regularly a conference of States parties CLSP in order to consider any matter with regard to the implementation of the present convention. The conference of state parties has met once each year since 2008. Back to you Peter.

Peter Blanck: So ambassador Gallegos were back and you have recently been honored, appropriately as to be the Chair of the conference of state parties. That so-called COSP, perhaps you can tell our listeners about that endeavor, the importance of it, how you came to that job and what you're working on?

Luis Gallegos: Well, thank you very much Peter, but I was just listening to the, the explanation of the convention. I'll tell you an anecdote of mine first and the convention was approved on the 13th of December of 2006. Which is my birthday. I think it's been the best gift I've ever received in my life. As the general assembly approved that convention on the day of my birthday and then it came into force the 3rd of May of 2008 upon the 20th ratification. Which was of Ecuador. We timed it to do that, because as we just spoke a few minutes ago, Ecuador is one of the leaders of the disability movement internationally.

I am the chairman of the convention of the state parties of the convention of persons with disabilities. It's a two year appointment. We have been chairs for 2019 and 2020. Each year we have a general meeting, which is I would say the highlight of the international disability communities meetings here in work.

We go over specific issues that we deal with that have to be approved both by state parties and by civil society. The last session was held last June. It was the 12th session of the costs and the thematic we included were technology, accessibility to technology, especially communication technologies and communication information culture and on sports and issues that have to deal with community values and felt issues.

We plan that the next cost, maybe according to our conversations with civil society, the disability community will be in part on the issues of political participation and peace. So it is a very intense meeting for a week in New York where we have over 1,500 participants and we have not only the meetings between the governments and civil society, but we also have parallel events, past meeting was near a hundred that'll be the COSP recently held its 12th session. As you said this past June, what is the current relation and activities in terms of the focus of the COSP and the CRPD going forward do you think specifically?

Well, the issues we have at hand are dealt with in a very democratic way in which we field the thematic that the meaning of the cost will have. They are dealt with civil societies inputs and with the academic inputs, also. Therefore the meetings are held in panels of experts on this with questions and answers from the, from the forum, but also the relevant reports that the countries. The members of the convention, which are 180 at this point, of where I've exceeded but will report to the convention on how they have advanced disability in the field of compliance with this convention.

He signs the convention creates a committee of experts that meets in Geneva, twice a year to monitor the reports of countries that are members of the convention and monitors their compliance and their reports. So, we have an integrated system also of national mechanisms. Following how countries as the parties are advancing in the compliance with the rights of persons with disabilities according to the convention.

Peter Blanck: Very important work ambassador. Perhaps you can take a step back now. You've been in so many important roles and from the beginning of the CRPD and before. What do you see as the most important pressing issues right now at the ground level that are needed to protect and promote the rights of people with disabilities across the globe?

Luis Gallegos: When we began the process, Peter, there was a bottle acquired by the disability community. That was nothing about us without us. I think that the, the major challenge is ownership. Is ownership by the persons with disabilities of this reality. I think political participation in democratic processes across the globe are extremely important. I think that persons have to be participating from the disability community into decision of public policy. There has to be an explanation to others, political spheres and economic

spheres ,in the social spheres on what the needs of the disability community are. This galvanizes the numbers.

According to the UN world health organization the last report in 2011 so this, these are, numbers from then. There were a billion people with disabilities around the world. Probably that number will be reviewed in the next report by obeyed by the World Bank and the World Called Tokenization.

So you have a number of persons that span the globe that are disabled, but you also have aging as a factor. And I would like to underline that because I have a very personal position in this. Because I do think that there are issues that we have to consider in the protection of the rights of persons with that are aging, that have to deal with these issues of disability. And the aging population is between 800 million and a billion. So you have a number of 2 billion people approximately that have or will have disabilities in the world.

Now then, those people also have sons and daughters, they are fathers, they have wives and families. So the number of stakeholders in this issue is well above the 4 billion people who have or are touched by some way on disabilities that demands a a vision of public policy, that was not clarified adequately before.

You have to have the numbers and the data to do this. You have to have inclusiveness in all senses of public life and in society. What I think we manage to have now is that the issue of disability be a conscious knowledgeable by the political elite and by the economic elite of countries, by transnational corporations and businesses. That now understand that it is a huge market that they should recognize and not despise. I'll leave aside to say it better, but I believe that the world society has changed in order to be more sensitive.

There are still a lot of work to do, because the disparities and the inequities of the disabled community are huge and we have to work very diligently. In creating the situations in education, the situations in the workplace that will permit the disability community to fully engage in our societies. I think that, is the ultimate goal of any society. To be a holistic society, where differences are respected and are part of reality and not an issue of discrimination or segregation.

Peter Blanck: So well said, Ambassador. I wanted to thank you again, we're almost out of time, but you and I could go on all day and I learned so much and so would our audience, but is there anything else you'd like to emphasize or share with our listening audience? You will be beamed all across the country and thousands of listeners will be very interested in, not only hearing about what you've done, but your vision for going forward. Are there any other issues you'd like to share?

Luis Gallegos: Thank you very much for this opportunity. It is a great opportunity to foster the cause of persons with disabilities. I'm a believer, I am a believer in God and I always have in my life had the hope for a better future. I think that this is a milestone in the history of the disability community, specially internationally with this convention. Which we all and a huge number of people help to do this. But I also think that we should look into the future with more hope that we can change our society. This is something that people do not think about when they look into the face of a person with a disability. We are changing society. We are making a difference in societies in which this Dermatic was despised by ignorance, by fear in many cases. We have to look at it in a realistic way to make our societies better and to make our societies whole as human beings. We have to respect the human rights of all.

Peter Blanck: Well, thank you so much Ambassador. As always, it is a terrific honor to listen to you, to hear from you and importantly to share your views with this very large listening audience. And again, this is Peter Blanck signing off from a terrific episode and we look forward to doing this again soon. Thank you.

Well listeners, our guests for this episode of ADA live has been Luis Gallegos, J D the ambassador, extraordinary and plenty of contemporary permanent representative of Ecuador to the United nations in New York. As always, we thank you for joining us for this episode of ADA live.

Barry Whaley: This episode and all previous ADA live episodes are available on our website at adalive.org as well as our sound cloud channel at [soundcloud.com/ADA live](https://soundcloud.com/ADA-live). All episodes are archived in a variety of formats, including streamed audio and accessible

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Remember to check out the ADA anniversary toolkit and the Southeast ADA center and the ADA national network for celebration of the ADA anniversary, the 30th anniversary on July 26, 2020 and also year round in celebration of the ADA. The toolkit, features media kit publications, other to keep the celebration going at www.adaanniversary.org. As a reminder, if you have questions about the Americans with disabilities act, you can submit your questions anytime online at adalive.org. You can contact your regional ADA center at (800) 949-4232 and please remember that all calls are free and they're confidential.

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"ADA Live" is a program of the Southeast ADA Center, the Burton-Blatt Institute at Syracuse University, and the ADA National Network. Our music is from 4 Wheel City, the movement for improvement. We look forward to having you join us on the next episode.

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