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Civil Rights and Disability Rights: "Our Destinies Are Tied Together"

(Birmingham, Ala.) -- The struggle for racial equality fought by Martin Luther King, Jr. and his contemporaries during the civil rights era continues today – and continues to serve as a model for other marginalized groups seeking their own justice. As evidence of the parallels between the two struggles, a unique alliance between the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (BCRI) and disability rights groups including, Self Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE), Advocating Change Together (ACT) and Alabama People First produces this month an unprecedented exhibit that is an exploration of the history and spirit of the disability rights movement.

"Making connections between disability and other civil and human rights struggles is what this exhibition is all about," says Ahmad Ward, head of education at BCRI. "BCRI takes seriously its role in promoting disability as a civil rights issue. We are committed to partnering with the disability community in seeking a deeper understanding of disability from a minority and cultural perspective."

The centerpiece of the six week exhibition (March 8th -- April 24th) is the Disability History Wall, a 21-panel collage created by ACT. SABE and Alabama People First contribute videos, posters, and various relics that capture the spirit of the modern disability rights struggle, telling firsthand stories of peoples' struggles and victories.

"Now is the time to take notice. It is important for people to know the history of the disability rights movement is not just about advocacy but people with disabilities demanding equal rights, said Chester Finn, chair of SABE. "This exhibit shows how similar the self-advocacy movement is to the civil rights movement."

Another unprecedented alliance between the civil rights movement and the disability rights movement will take place in September when Martin Luther King, III appears as the keynote speaker at The Alliance for Full Participation's first Summit. The Alliance is a unique meeting of organizations serving the disabilities field. Through the Alliance, these organizations have joined together for the first time to realize the vision of people with developmental disabilities living meaningful, productive and personally satisfying lives in the community of their choice. The summit will be an historical meeting of disability rights organizations and leaders from around the nation to discuss the vision, strategy and issues of achieving full participation and inclusion for people with disabilities. SABE is a founding member of The Alliance.

President and CEO of the King Center in Atlanta, Ga., Martin Luther King, III is the second oldest of four children of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. A believer in his father's principles of non-violence, King has been a steadfast leader for a variety of causes, including fighting for the freedom of Nelson Mandela and justice in South Africa, addressing the moral and political dilemmas of Haiti, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, speaking to the United Nations on behalf of individuals living with the challenges of AIDS, and combating racial profiling. Like his father, King believes that decent health care, education, housing, employment and the pursuit of individual happiness are rights that everyone in America should have, and has said of the civil rights movement and the disability rights movement, "Our destinies are tied together." King will speak at the Summit on September ???.

For more information about The Alliance for Full Participation, SABE, The Self-Advocacy Exhibit at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute of America, or Martin Luther King III's appearance at The Alliance Summit, please contact Jim Carroll at 410-204-1972 or jcarroll@candecommunications.com.