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KEESWOOD ATTENDS WORLD TELECOMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE

Navajo Nation Council delegate Ervin Keeswood attended the World Telecommunication Development Conference March 7-15 in Qatar.

The conference is convened approximately every four years. During the last conference held in 2002, an action plan was initiated with the goal of narrowing the digital divide between developed and developing countries, urban and rural areas, and across the generations.

There were 37 countries in attendance at this conference with a total of 970 participants. The Navajo Nation submitted Document 106 R1 for approval by the world community, which was approved with no objections.

Keeswood, who has been attending meetings with the United Nations regarding the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples since 1995, said that participation at this conference was especially significant because in the past, indigenous people were not recognized during discussions on international telecommunications. Instead, indigenous peoples were grouped in the same category as people who live in rural areas. Now, indigenous peoples have point of contact for their issues within the United Nations.

“While the work on the draft declaration continues, the Navajo Nation has obtained status in the UN that no other indigenous group has ever done, which is to become a sector member with voting rights equal to countries of the worlds, such as the United States, Canada, Mexico and France,” Keeswood said. “The Navajo Nation has become the voice of the indigenous peoples of the world.”

The Navajo Nation was able to set the groundwork for the next four years to advocate for indigenous peoples to receive funding within their communities.

“We are thinking in terms of economic development for our Navajo Nation. If we are able to connect our people to the world community through telecommunications, we will be able to share information and foster economic development,” Keeswood said.

One barrier that needs to be worked on is the need for basic electricity in every Navajo home to increase connectivity, Keeswood said.

Keeswood is the Council delegate for Hogback Chapter in New Mexico and serves as the Chairperson of the Government Services Committee and a member of the Intergovernmental Relations Committee of the Navajo Nation Council.

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