

**President Joe Shirley, Jr.
Address to the WSIS Tunisia
on Behalf of Indigenous
Peoples and the Information Society “Towards an Indigenous Portal”**

Brothers and sisters, Ya’a’teeh and greetings from the Navajo Nation.

I am Joe Shirley, Jr.

I am honored and humbled to have the privilege to present to you the results of the parallel event entitled the “Indigenous Peoples and the Information Society: Towards an International Indigenous Portal”.

This historic report is now available for your review.

Today, I am here as a member of the International Indigenous Steering Committee (IISC), which affirms the hopes and dreams of self-determination for more than 370 million Indigenous people around the world. Our ancestors were here before others.

Within the deep roots of our Indigenous families is buried a timeless wisdom.

This wisdom has kept our peoples self-sustainable for thousands of years.

Information is not wisdom. Information is without value if it is not available to those who need it.

Knowledge, combined with the wisdom of our peoples, is what creates true opportunity.

This is why our peoples call for universal Indigenous connectivity and the development of Indigenous-specific ICTs. These should be viewed as a necessity for healthy communities.

One such initiative is an International Indigenous Portal.

A portal is much more than a web interface. It is a focal point where Indigenous content will be available from our peoples and other stakeholders.

Our portal will allow us to share, with our own voices, our traditions, values, history and language as well as our aspirations for the future.

In addition, universal connectivity will help us to address other pressing economic and social development issues, including poverty alleviation, education, health and capacity building.

Support for these ICT initiatives, as well as our connectivity and developmental needs, must come not only from us but in partnership with our friends.

Such cooperation will help us to establish, operate, maintain and even expand our portal by ourselves.

Indigenous peoples are a valuable part of the information society, and universal connectivity will help us to maintain our values, languages, traditions and sovereignty.

If we do not relate technology to our cultures, and assert our rights to this new digital territory, we believe ICTs will become just another solution in search of a problem.

When this Summit ends, we will continue in our efforts to provide ICT for our peoples so that our children and grandchildren will have the tools to provide for future generations.

We therefore strongly encourage a Global Indigenous ICT Forum be held within the next 2 years.

At the heart of our vision is respect for the dignity and human rights of all Indigenous peoples. These ideals are enshrined in the Millennium Development Goals, the Millennium Declaration, and the Second International Decade of the Worlds' Indigenous People. This must be affirmed by all stakeholders if the digital divide is to be truly bridged.

This is one way we will exercise true sovereignty.

We are grateful for the opportunity to address you today, and hope that our paths will continue forward to bring peace, health, knowledge and sustainability to all our peoples.

Thank you.