

Preface

Dear Minister,

The OECD's annual ministerial gathering is special this year because for the first time, alongside the regular meeting, we are welcoming health ministers. The Council at Ministerial level will be held under the chairmanship of Luis Ernesto Derbez Bautista, Secretary of Foreign Affairs of Mexico; the meeting of health ministers will be chaired by Julio Frenk, Secretary of Health of Mexico.

I hope and expect that the discussions and outcomes of both these meetings will be useful to ministers as they grapple with their domestic economic and social agendas as well as with issues in the world economy. Economic recovery is now broadening. Impressive recoveries are under way in the US, the UK and Japan. But economic growth in some of the largest euro area economies remains anæmic and unemployment continues to be a serious issue for many countries. Financial scandals involving important companies have demonstrated the need to strengthen systems of corporate governance – a reason why the OECD's Principles of Corporate Governance have recently been revised.

Ministers will also address the longer term challenge of strengthening growth in an era of demographic change. Without changes in existing policies, population ageing will cause a marked slowdown in economic growth in most OECD countries and a marked deterioration of public finances. The challenge is to design and implement labour market and social policies that will increase employment and preserve the long-run sustainability both of public finances and, in particular, pensions.

International trade and investment must also continue to be a source of prosperity for all nations. At the meeting, ministers both from OECD countries and a number of emerging and developing countries will endeavour to inject momentum in the Doha Development Agenda, notably by addressing developing country concerns.

The meeting of OECD health ministers will consider the results of the OECD's three-year health project "Towards High-Performing Health Systems". Over the last three decades, the share of health spending in total national spending in the OECD area has doubled. This is set to rise even further as the growing numbers of older people in our populations increase the demand for healthcare. OECD analysis indicates however that there is considerable room to improve the efficiency of our health systems as a contribution to meeting the challenge of rising health costs.

Ministers of health and of finance and economics will also have the opportunity to discuss jointly the challenge of ensuring the financial stability of our health systems.

In association with these ministerial meetings, the OECD is organising the fifth edition of its OECD Forum, "Health of Nations". The Forum will provide the opportunity to discuss these same issues in an open public event involving business and labour leaders, and civil society personalities, along with government ministers and leaders of international organisations.

The health of nations depends on the health of our citizens, the health of our economies and the health of multilateral co-operation. I look forward to welcoming you to the OECD Ministerial and to the Forum where together we will seek the ways to strengthen all these elements for the health of our nations.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Donald J. Johnston', written in a cursive style.

Donald J. Johnston