

Opening Remarks for OECD Meeting by the Leader of Government Business

**Hon. McKeeva Bush
Minister for Tourism, Cayman Islands**

**OECD Global Forum Meeting of the Joint Ad Hoc Group on Accounts hosted by
the Government of the Cayman Islands**

28 October – 1 November

Ministers of Government, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to welcome you to the Cayman Islands on behalf of the people of the Cayman Islands. In my capacity as Minister for Tourism, I hope you will permit me to encourage you to get out and about when you can during your time with us to enjoy our many restaurants, meet our people and experience the natural beauty of our islands.

The subject matter of the meetings which we are now embarking on is of great importance to everyone here. The process of defining acceptable modes for competition in financial services is about to enter a new phase with the opening of more broad-based discussions on what are termed level playing field issues. The requirement of fairness as expressed in the conditional nature of the commitments given by many of the nations gathered here is focused on the requirement of a “level playing field”. This same requirement of fairness was repeated in the discussions around the creation of a model agreement for the exchange of tax information and included in the final text. So while the technical discussions also scheduled to take place later this week are useful, they should not obscure the over-riding imperative of working together to resolve level playing field issues to the satisfaction of all countries. In this regard, we commend the OECD Bureau members and the Chair of Committee on Fiscal Affairs for recognising the primacy of these issues by attending this meeting.

The Cayman Islands along with many other countries has consistently advocated that the design of new rules to facilitate cross-border exchange of information must evolve through a consensual process which includes the following elements:

- achieving a international understanding in which all countries must be subject to the same rules for the same activities, implemented on the same timetable and with the same consequences for non-co-operation;
- discussion of issues in a universal forum which includes all jurisdictions that may be affected by the outcome of the discussions;
- appropriate regard to competing considerations, such as reasonable financial privacy; and

- the adoption of rules which are proportionate and risk-based so that legitimate commerce is not unduly burdened.

Most of the smaller countries gathered here do not have the types of highly diversified economies found in the G7 states or the other Member States of the OECD. This adds to the imperative that we maintain the competitive position of our financial services industries in order to provide food for our people and schools for our children. It is very important for us that as we go forward in this process that great care is taken to ensure that the current disparity which exists in regard to the onerous burdens sought to be placed on our shoulders and the less onerous burdens which are advocated for many of our more geo-politically powerful competitors is not increased.

The barrier to cooperation confronting many non-OECD countries is outlined in the recently published report entitled "Towards a Level Playing Field" which was produced by the international law firm Stikeman-Elliott. It is our hope that today's meeting will mark an inflection point in relations between our countries. I am sure that everyone here will agree that effective cooperation in this process will require that accurate information be available to all participants. It is critical for all concerned that the subjective, incomplete and ill-informed speculation which has been all too prevalent is replaced with objective, complete and accurate comparative information.

I would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm the Cayman Islands commitment to achieving a level playing field of rules and standards on trade in services matters including tax competition. We are competitors but that does not require that we are adversaries.

I wish all the participating delegations clear skies and clear thinking during this week in our beautiful Islands.

Thank you.