Thank you this opportunity to offer some initial thoughts on the Cardoso Panel report (A/58/817) and new modalities for engagement

1. One of the first (and perhaps also the last) questions for us is who will be doing the follow-up on the report?

Who in the Secretariat will do this?– see especially Section VII, including paras. 144, 145, and 146

Which Member States will take up the cause? How can we encourage some? We need Member States to commit to introducing resolutions in the General Assembly (GA) and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) which would implement many of the reforms suggested by the Panel. Which ones are ready to do that?

2. More broadly how can we ensure that Member States will respond to the Report as there does not appear to be a request for that at this stage? Should civil society organize a hearing and invite members of the Committee on NGOs to respond to matters relevant to them?

3. While the Panel’s report makes a distinction between NGOs and other groups, such as business, parliamentarians and local authorities, the proposal to collect them all under an Office of Constituency Engagement and Partnerships could lead to the kind of confusion about what are NGOs that the Panel explicitly said (p. 13) it wants to avoid. It is reasonable to be concerned that the gathering together of all of these entities will result in a dilution of attention to the needs of NGOs (in the traditional sense of the term). Furthermore, parliamentarians and local authorities are inextricably related to government and thus not and not like NGOs. Of course, the Panel isn’t the source of this conundrum; its roots lie in the unclear rationale used for the designation of Major Groups at UNCED in 1994 and the subsequent decisions of the ECOSOC Committee on NGOs after the adoption of resolution 1996/31 to admit to consultative status a number of organizations which do not fit the traditional pattern, such as some of the Government-organized NGOs and those associated with political movements and parties. I want to be clear that I am not speaking critically of all relatively newer NGOs which have obtained consultative status. For the most part the UN system is the richer for their insights and analysis and we need more and more voices from the Global South to be heard and listened to. However, in the face of the possible accumulation of the disparate entities named by the Panel into this new Office of Constituency Engagement and Partnerships, NGOs need to consider alternatives and, as appropriate, advocate for them instead with Member States. A strategy needs to be developed.

4. Private sector accountability is weak throughout the Panel’s report. There is a strong reliance on voluntary compliance, but experience has shown that review mechanisms are needed. For example, how are business sector participants in the Global Compact held accountable to member states? There is no comparable mechanism to ECOSOC res. 1996/31 but there could be, unless we shift the entire accountability process in the ways
suggested in Section VII, i.e. Proposals 19, 20 and 21 on accreditation, which I generally support. The point is that there needs to be an accreditation and accountability process of some sort for business -- not just their associations -- when they are interacting with the UN system. Economic power has to be kept in check by political processes. Otherwise, more power will gravitate to the haves at the expense of the have-nots.

5. This presupposes a possible difference of opinion I would register with the Panel on the treatment of the business sector. They are considered separate from civil society. Perhaps, they are but they need to have their relationship with the UN system scrutinized in a fashion similar to that of others in civil society.

6. The Panel doesn’t explicitly call for a review of ECOSOC res. 1297 (1968), but that would be needed if we proceed with the accreditation review. As it stands DPI NGOs are only supposed to be sharing information about the UN with their constituencies but we know many do more than this – they use associated status to circumvent the scrutiny involved in obtaining consultative status. Given the politicization of the consultative process -- correctly noted by the Panel in paras. 121, 123 and 127 -- this is understandable, though not excusable.

7. The concept of a wider range of hearings is very welcome. These discussions are important at the major UN centers but even more important to be held at the national or regional levels as noted by the Panel. For example, the proposed hearing on the Millennium Development Goals should be preceded by at least regional, if not national-level, hearings also. Often regional meetings are the most cost-effective and efficient way to obtain substantive input on specific subjects or for the wide themes and topics associated with world conferences and special sessions of the GA. This is taken up in the discussion of a country-level focus in Section VIII and the need to address the North-South imbalances. UNDP resident coordinators and the UN Information Centers can help with these as stated in paras. 89, 91 and 92. But greater financial resources are essential to greater and more intentional inclusion of Southern NGO viewpoints in UN deliberations and are a must.