



New offensive against Desert locust Aerial control operations on the Red Sea coast and in the Horn of Africa

28 March 2007, Rome – In a new offensive against the desert locust, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) today called on countries in northeast Africa to intensify survey and control operations, particularly on the Red Sea coast of Eritrea and Sudan and in northwest Somalia.

FAO and the Desert Locust Control Organization for Eastern Africa (DLCO-EA) have launched aerial control operations on the Red Sea coast near the Sudanese and Eritrean border to eliminate small swarms that are forming from a local outbreak that has been underway since the end of last year. Ground control operations against hopper and adult infestations have been in progress in both countries for several months.

DLCO-EA aerial operations will also start this week on the coast of northwest Somalia near Djibouti. This new offensive against an old enemy is conducted in close cooperation with local anti-locust teams.

If the swarms are not controlled on the Red Sea coast, they are likely to migrate to cropping areas in the Tokar Delta on the coast of Sudan and to the Eritrean Highlands, where it will be difficult to stop them from attacking pastures and crops.

Swarms could migrate westwards

"Once the locusts invade the Highlands, there is a slight risk that some swarms could migrate towards the summer breeding areas in the interior of Sudan before the rainy season starts. In this case, they could continue westwards in search of favourable green vegetation in Chad, Niger and Mali," FAO Desert Locust expert Keith Cressman said.

"Swarms could even reach Mauritania next June, in time for the beginning of the summer rains," according to Cressman, who recalled that a similar movement towards West Africa from the Red Sea last occurred in 1993.

Careful monitoring

In the meantime, FAO urges all concerned countries to keep monitoring the situation carefully, especially in the coastal plains in northwest Somalia as well in neighbouring areas in Djibouti, Ethiopia and Yemen.

According to FAO, any small immature swarms that escape control operations in northwest Somalia could move towards the Eritrean Highlands, across the Gulf of Aden to southern Yemen, inland towards the Ethiopian

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border, or simply stay on the coast and eventually breed once the long rains commence. So far, a few swarms have crossed the Ethiopian border and were seen near Jigjiga.

Saudi Arabia

FAO is also following the situation carefully in two other important areas – the Red Sea coastal plains of Saudi Arabia and in the spring breeding areas of Southwest Asia.

Local breeding occurred on the Saudi coast south of Jeddah and, earlier this week, reports were received of small swarms. National teams have been deployed to the infested areas to conduct the necessary control operations.

Unusually good rains fell earlier this month over a large area of northern Oman, southeast Iran and western Pakistan. Ecological conditions will improve in the areas where it rained and locusts are expected to increase due to breeding during the spring.

There is a slight risk that if more swarms form in northwest Somalia, some of them could reach these spring breeding areas. Iran and Pakistan are conducting a joint ground survey on both sides of their common border in Baluchistan during April to clarify the situation.

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