



## **Locusts could reach India and Pakistan Swarms expected to cross Indian Ocean – Situation in Yemen remains serious**

**4 July 2007, Rome** – Desert Locust swarms from Ethiopia and northern Somalia are expected to cross the Indian Ocean and could reach India and Pakistan in the next days, FAO said today. This potentially dangerous situation should be closely monitored in both countries.

Two recent tropical cyclones have caused heavy rainfall in Pakistan and western India that will create unusually favourable breeding conditions for locusts until October along both sides of the Indo-Pakistan border and, for the first time in many years, in coastal areas of western Pakistan.

The governments in India and Pakistan have been warned and they are mobilizing field teams, equipment and resources in Rajasthan and Gujarat, India as well as in adjacent areas of Cholistan and Tharparkar deserts in Pakistan, FAO said.

“Desert Locusts usually fly with the wind and can travel up to about 100-150 km in a day,” said FAO locust expert Keith Cressman. “Locusts can stay in the air for long periods of time. For example, locusts regularly cross the Red Sea, a distance of around 300 km.”

Crossing the Indian Ocean on monsoon winds is part of the natural migration cycle of Desert Locusts and has already occurred in the past.

### **Emergency operations in Yemen**

Meanwhile Yemen is facing the worst locust outbreak in nearly 15 years.

Desert Locusts have infested large areas in the remote interior along the southern edge of the Empty Quarter, stretching from Marib to the Oman border. Locust numbers are likely to increase dramatically as a second generation of breeding continues in these areas. Agricultural crops in Wadi Hadhramaut and other areas including the Sanaa highlands could be at risk.

FAO is organizing an emergency aerial control campaign in the interior of Yemen that will start later this month.

The \$5 million campaign will be financed by the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (\$2.4 million), the government of Japan (\$2 million) and the government of Yemen. The funds will support two helicopters, pesticide, equipment, vehicles, and locust control and

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logistics experts.

The campaign is initially expected to last 30 days but could be longer depending on the weather and locust developments.

If the campaign is not successful, there is a risk of numerous swarms forming and invading countries along both sides of the Red Sea during the autumn.

Desert Locusts are migratory grasshoppers that often travel in vast swarms. A Desert Locust lives about three to five months. The life cycle comprises three stages: egg, hopper and adult.

A Desert Locust adult consumes roughly its own weight in fresh food per day -- about two grams. However, a very small part of an average swarm eats as much food in one day as about 2 500 people.

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