

Locust swarms invade West Africa

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5 July 2004, Rome -- The first desert locust swarms have moved from their spring breeding areas in Northwest Africa to several Sahelian countries in West Africa, specifically Mauritania, Senegal and Mali, FAO said today.

"Many more swarms are expected in these countries as well as in Niger and Chad in the coming weeks," the UN agency warned.

As summer rains have already started in the Sahel, egg-laying is likely to occur within a vast area that stretches from the Atlantic coast in Mauritania to Chad. This could extend further into Darfur in western Sudan.

"A dramatic increase in locusts could threaten crop production during the coming months," FAO said, calling for additional international assistance.

Aid needed

"Additional international aid is urgently needed to supplement the major efforts already made, in particular by the countries concerned, and to prevent the situation from developing into a plague," FAO said.

The current desert locust upsurge is the most serious since the last plague of 1987-89.

Due to the size and number of the current locust infestations, effective control can only be carried out by conventional pesticides. More than 4 million hectares have been treated so far in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya and Mauritania.

Monitor and control

Well-directed control measures and careful monitoring on the ground need to continue, FAO emphasized.

All efforts should be made to use the most environmentally friendly products and properly calibrated spray equipment to minimize risks to the environment and human and animal health. FAO is actively encouraging field trials on the use of alternative products such as biological pesticides.

So far, \$9 million of emergency assistance has been pledged. FAO has contributed nearly \$2 million from its own resources and donors have provided \$7 million. In addition, each affected country has contributed substantially to the locust campaign.

To respond better to future emergencies, longer-term support is also needed to strengthen national capacities in early warning, early reaction and research within FAO's Emergency Prevention System for Transboundary Animal and Plant Pests and Diseases (EMPRES).

The costs of the last locust plague in 1987-89 amounted to more than \$300 million and control operations were carried out in 28 countries.

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Related links

- **FAO desert locust information service**
<http://www.fao.org/NEWS/GLOBAL/LOCUSTS/Locuhome.htm>