



DESERT LOCUST CLARIFICATION

FAO Emergency Centre for Locust Operations



(30 October 2003)



Clarification on the Desert Locust Situation in North Africa

On 17 October 2003, FAO issued an Alert which was distributed to all locust-affected countries and other interested parties in three languages, English, French and Arabic. This described the outbreaks in Mauritania, Niger and Sudan, and said that the situation was of concern also in Mali. It mentioned that FAO was coordinating action to ensure that the situation did not deteriorate further. The Alert was followed, on 20 October, with a Press Release.

Unfortunately, certain sections of the Press have subsequently exaggerated the extent of the problem and have suggested that a plague is developing. FAO's view is that the measures currently being undertaken in the infested areas are generally sufficient for the present, but that the situation needs to be carefully monitored. Furthermore the Desert Locust populations in Sudan and the Red Sea area are unlikely to have any immediate impact on the locust situation in West and North-West Africa. This note therefore focuses on an assessment of the situation as it may affect Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya.

Since the Alert was issued, there have been further developments. These include a small outbreak that is now in progress in **Mali** and limited control operations have started there. Local breeding has been reported in southeastern **Algeria** and southwestern **Libya**. Surveys are underway by the national authorities and small-scale control has started in Algeria. Unusually heavy rainfall has occurred over a large swathe of locust habitat in western Mauritania and in the Adrar Souttouf in southern **Morocco** right up to the plains east of the Atlas Mountains in Oued Draa. Some adults

from the existing locust populations in Mauritania have moved into these areas where conditions should be favourable for breeding.

In terms of executing preventive control, FAO considers that the first step is the careful monitoring of all typical locust habitats supporting green vegetation by locust survey teams. FAO will continue to provide satellite images to assist teams in identifying likely areas. Any gregarizing locust populations in these areas should be controlled. However given the expected drop in temperatures as winter sets in, the rate of reproduction will slow down, giving teams more time to discover and control locust concentrations.

An outbreak is the first and earliest stage in the transition from a calm (recession) situation to that of a plague. If additional outbreaks develop in other regions, the next stage, an upsurge, can occur. If this is not controlled, a plague could develop but not in the near future. Many ecological factors including continuing rainfall in the winter and spring breeding areas have to come in to play, if the present locust populations are to continue growing. It is not necessary for North African countries to undergo a full mobilisation of their resources as if a Desert locust plague was imminent. What is needed is a more moderate effort to check likely areas and control the small populations that are found. This can be done with much more limited resources preferably in close collaboration with FAO. As the situation and the ecological factors develop, further adjustments either decreasing the survey and control teams or increasing them can be made. The FAO Desert Locust Information Service will continue to keep all countries informed on a regular basis through the monthly Bulletin, supplemented by Updates and Alerts as necessary.

The most up-to-date information on the situation is available on the Internet (www.fao.org/news/global/locusts/locuhome.htm) as well as maps of the latest infestations (193.43.36.11/mapper).

The FAO Desert Bulletin is issued monthly, supplemented by Updates during periods of increased Desert Locust activity, and is distributed by fax, e-mail, FAO pouch and airmail by the Locusts and Other Migratory Pests Group, AGP Division, FAO, 00100 Rome, Italy. It is also available on the Internet.

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