

FAO welcomes increased commitment to contain Desert Locusts

2 September 2004 -- FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf said the next two months in the battle against Desert Locusts will be "extremely crucial".

2 September 2004, Rome -- Calling the next two months in the battle against Desert Locusts in West Africa "extremely crucial," Dr. Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), today welcomed the decisive outcome of a Ministerial Meeting held in Dakar, Senegal, in response to the Desert Locust threat to crops and pasture in the region.

"To make a real impact in the battle to control the Desert Locust upsurge, help must arrive this month in order to disrupt the next locust breeding cycle in October," Dr. Diouf said. "Otherwise the infestation could spread to even more countries in Africa threatening food security in a wide area."

Dr. Diouf said that there was an urgent need to get large quantities of pesticides, spraying equipment and other means to the scene, but to do so required funds which were only now becoming available.

"Locusts don't respect political boundaries, so it is essential that the countries in the region work closely together to tackle this emergency. I warmly welcome the commitment and determination shown by the ministers," Dr. Diouf said.

The complex battle to control the locust upsurge in western Africa calls for close coordination and cooperation among the affected countries, donor countries and organizations and UN agencies with technical expertise such as FAO, he said.

Since October 2003 FAO has been warning of the growing threat to crops from locust swarms caused by the abundant rains that fell in the summer of 2003 throughout much of West Africa.

FAO recognized the impending threat thanks to the early warning systems developed by the Locust Group as part of the special FAO programme called EMPRES (Emergency Prevention System for Transboundary Animal and Plant Pests and Diseases).

\$100 million needed

FAO has called on international donors for \$100 million to support affected countries in their battle to control the widespread locust outbreaks. So far, the international community has responded by pledging \$37 million. This includes contributions channelled through FAO as well as bilateral donor contributions.

Dr. Diouf said: "In order to further strengthen FAO's response to this crisis, I have decided to re-establish the Organization's Emergency Centre for Locust Operations (ECLLO). The Centre will deal directly with donors, with the countries at risk and with other organizations."

To lend urgency to efforts to contain the locust emergency, which is especially severe in West

African countries, FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf wrote in July to the Heads of State of donor countries and the heads of financial institutions requesting their assistance.

To date, FAO has provided about \$5 million to six countries and to four regional projects across West and North Africa.

Canada, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, the African Development Bank, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United States of America, the Islamic Development Bank, Norway, France, Italy and the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development, have committed another \$17 million to FAO's locust control campaign.*

Regular Desert Locust bulletins issued

FAO's Desert Locust Information Service regularly produces bulletins, forecasts and updates on the locust situation in countries at risk based on reports received from locust-affected countries and using other sources of information including satellite images.

During locust emergencies, FAO informs the international community about the locust situation, launches aid appeals, coordinates international assistance, procures pesticides, equipment such as sprayers, protective clothing, flying hours and organizes their delivery to the affected areas.

FAO provides technical advice to affected countries and monitors the implementation of control operations. The Organization encourages the safe use of pesticides and is actively investigating the use of alternative products.

There are three regional locust commissions - for Northwest and West Africa, the Red Sea countries and Southwest Asia. Their task is to build national capacities, provide training, encourage survey and control operations and coordinate locust campaigns. The commissions are administered by FAO with secretariats in Cairo and Algiers. The Commissions meet annually and are funded by the concerned countries.

Strengthening national capacities

The long-term EMPRES development programme, funded by donors and FAO, strengthens national locust units in early warning and early reaction and research. Its activities complement the work of the regional locust commissions. Eventually these EMPRES activities will be taken over by the regional commissions.

The Pesticide Referee Group, a body of independent experts, evaluates field data on pesticide trials against locusts and advises FAO on the effectiveness of pesticides for locust control. The group also assesses the environmental risk of each pesticide.

Each affected country has a government ministry charged with running the national control operation. Plant protection experts are responsible for monitoring the situation on the ground, managing locust campaigns and preparing environmental assessments.

The current situation

The locust situation continues to deteriorate in West Africa. Substantial breeding is in progress over a large area of southern Mauritania, in the Sahelian zone of Mali and in western Niger and in northern and central Senegal. Hatching has occurred and hopper bands are forming in all of these countries.

The first generation of summer swarms in Mauritania can be expected to form in the coming

days. In the coming weeks they will form in other countries. Several locust swarms from northwest Africa reached both western and northeastern Chad earlier in August.

A few swarms have also reached northern Burkina Faso. The swarms have laid eggs in both countries. Significant crop damage has been reported in several countries. Control operations are underway in all these countries but they are hampered by insufficient resources.

* Donor countries and organizations are listed according to the amount of their contributions, with the largest contributor being first.

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- **Locust Update**

<http://www.fao.org/news/global/locusts/locuhome.htm>

- **Locust Threat in Mauritania - feature**

<http://www.fao.org/newsroom/en/news/2004/49307/index.html>