



FAO warns: dangerous desert locust situation forecast along the red sea this winter

The situation should be monitored closely and carefully

12 November 2007, Rome- A Desert Locust outbreak has developed during October in northern Sudan, which could give rise to a potentially dangerous situation in the region. According to the latest bulletin issued this month by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Desert Locust infestations will intensify along both sides of the Red Sea this winter. FAO warned that all efforts are required to monitor the situation closely and carefully, and to undertake control as necessary in the coming months.

Recent field reports indicate that locust numbers have increased in the summer breeding areas in Sudan, primarily north and east of Khartoum where ground surveys could be conducted. Unusually favourable breeding conditions have caused wingless hoppers to concentrate and form small bands while adults have formed several small swarms. The Government immediately mobilized aerial and ground control teams that have treated more than 11,000 ha so far. Nevertheless, it is difficult to find and treat all of the locust infestations in the remote desert areas. Consequently, more swarms could form in the interior and move to the Red Sea coastal plains in Sudan during November.

Locusts are already present and breeding on the Red Sea coast in Sudan, mainly in the Tokar Delta where small groups and bands of hoppers formed last week. The delta is the most important agricultural area on the Sudanese coast. As adults arrive from the interior, they will rapidly mature and lay eggs in the delta. Hatching and band formation are likely to occur from about mid-December onwards.

Although the risk of infestations spreading from Sudan to adjacent countries is very low at the moment, small locust populations are already present and breeding along the Red Sea coastal plains in Yemen and northern Eritrea. Local breeding is expected to commence shortly on the Red Sea coast in southeast Egypt and in Saudi Arabia.

If good rains fall along the coast this winter, locust numbers are likely to increase dramatically and significant infestations could develop by February that would require substantial control operations. Once conditions dry out along the coast, locust swarms could form and move towards the east to the Arabian Peninsula and towards the west to Darfur by early summer.

Early warning and rapid response are crucial in protecting agriculture and minimizing the risk of a new locust plague developing. The

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Japanese Government continues to support these efforts and has contributed \$2 million for improving surveys, information and collaboration within the region.

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. A very small part of an average swarm eats as much as food in one day as about 2,500 people.

The FAO Desert Locust Bulletin is issued monthly by the FAO Locust and Other Migratory Pests Group. It is usually supplemented by Updates during periods of increased Desert Locust activity. The bulletin is available in English, French and Arabic on FAO's Locust Watch website (www.fao.org/ag/locusts).

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