

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP  
59th MEETING**

**22-23 November 2004  
UNHCR - Geneva**

**Review of Follow-up to the 58th IASC WG Meeting: Update on Desert Locust  
Infestations in the Sahel Region**

**Circulated: 9 November 2004**

## **I. Background**

This note responds to a request from the IASC to provide a brief update on the Desert Locust disaster in the Sahel. During the 58<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the IASC Working Group held on 22-24 September in New York, FAO has provided a background on the locust infestations and an outline of immediate measures to support advocacy efforts in dealing with the crisis.

## **II. General findings from crop assessment missions**

According to the preliminary findings of crop assessment missions to nine countries in the Sahel, regional cereal production in the region will not be affected in a major way this year, despite large-scale Desert Locust infestations, but a combination of drought and locusts have caused severe localized damage to crops, pasture and legumes in many rural communities. The situation is particularly critical in Mauritania, where locusts continue to destroy crops and where the damage could get worse.

Although many locust swarms are still present in Mauritania and Niger, pressure from the pests is gradually easing in Mali and Senegal. The locusts are moving towards northwest Mauritania and Western Sahara, and an increasing number of swarms have reached Morocco and Algeria where intense ground and aerial control operations are under way.

Following several days of strong southwesterly winds, some swarms have reached the Mediterranean coast either side of the border between Libya and Egypt, while others have reached Crete, Cyprus and Lebanon.

The crop assessment mission was jointly conducted by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS). The World Food Programme (WFP) collaborated on these assessments in the five most affected countries. The synthesis report is expected to be published by the end of November.

### **III. Cereal production in the region**

Cereal production in the Sahel, mainly millet, sorghum, rice and maize, is not expected to reach the level of last year's record harvest of around 14 million tonnes, but will remain within the five-year average of around 11.6 million tonnes.

The drop in production, with most harvests to be completed by the end of November, is mainly caused by insufficient and irregular rains and by Desert Locusts. However, the intensive Desert Locust control campaign coordinated by FAO has definitely contributed to limiting the impact of locusts on crop production.

The main cereal producing areas in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger and Senegal, the so-called breadbaskets, registered favourable rains this year and were not overly affected by Desert Locusts. The drop in cereal production occurred mainly in the northern Sahel-zones of these countries, due to the combined effects of drought and locusts.

### **IV. The locust situation in Mauritania**

The country mostly affected by adverse growing conditions, including Desert Locusts, is Mauritania, where up to 50 percent of cereal production may be lost. Mauritania has already faced several years of drought and poor harvests. The ability of the Mauritians to cope with this situation has been exhausted. Households largely dependent on their own crop production and livestock herds for family food needs are especially at risk.

Food assistance and the delivery of agricultural inputs will be needed to improve the food security situation of affected communities and allow farmers to plant their fields and feed their animals.

Farmers severely hit by poor rains and Desert Locust infestations in other countries (Niger, Mali, Senegal, Chad and Burkina Faso) will also need assistance to resume agricultural production. FAO intends to call for donor emergency funds to support early agricultural rehabilitation for farmers severely affected.

The situation of pastoral groups in the region needs to be closely monitored. There are already strong indications that herders are moving earlier than usual with their animals in search of food and fodder from affected areas to zones offering better vegetation, but already overgrazed. De-stocking has also taken place on a large scale in many areas.

### **V. The locust campaign**

As of 1<sup>st</sup> November 2004, FAO has so far received \$52.4 million from donors and has added \$6 million of its own funds for Desert Locust control operations. Around \$15 million have been pledged but not yet received.

To date, FAO has ordered more than two million litres of pesticides at a total value of \$14.7 million, and already delivered more than half the total. FAO has contracted 14

spray and survey aircraft for locust control in the region, and others have been supplied on a bilateral and national basis.

As a result of national, bilateral and multilateral efforts, some 1.9 million hectares infested by locusts have been treated in the Sahel countries since the beginning of the campaign this summer. FAO has all along encouraged that control operations follow accepted good practice standards, by which health and environmental side-effects are minimized. Funds are also being provided to collect empty pesticide drums and ensure that proper disposal procedures are followed.

The locust menace could well shift to the Sahel again next summer and millions of dollars could be saved in future if countries invest in the early surveillance of locust breeding areas and targeted control campaigns. Plant protection services and their locust control units in the affected countries need to be strengthened in the early detection of locust breeding areas and the implementation of rapid control activities.

Prepared by: FAO, November 2004