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REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Fight against locust and grasshopper infestation in Africa

Note by the Secretary-General

1. In its resolution 1988/3 of 24 May 1988, the Economic and Social Council expressed its deep concern at the worsening desert locust and grasshopper infestation in Africa, invited the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to keep the situation under constant review and to strengthen that organization's capabilities with regard to the overall co-ordination of the Emergency Centre for Locust Operations.
2. In accordance with paragraph 10 of the above-mentioned resolution, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly the updated text of the report that the Director-General of FAO submitted to the Economic and Social Council at its second regular session of 1988 (see annex).

ANNEX

Desert locust plague in Africa

Report of the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture
Organization of the United Nations

1. During 1988, the desert locust situation has deteriorated further despite large-scale campaigns in many countries organised by the Governments of the affected countries and generously supported by the international donor community.
2. In March, there was a major swarm invasion of north-west Africa. Extensive and intensive campaigns were mounted in Morocco, where control operations had started in October 1987, and in Algeria, Tunisia and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. At a planning meeting attended by donors and affected countries, held in Rome in April, it was still hoped that intensive control operations could partly stop the further development of the plague. Unfortunately, three subsequent events have taken away that optimism.
3. First of all, there was a southward movement of swarms from spring breeding in north-west Africa into the Sahelian zone much earlier than foreseen. Based on historical data and the normal winds, it was expected that the movement would occur during June-July, but swarms started to reach the Sahel in March. Secondly, and notwithstanding the spraying of over 5 million hectares in north-west Africa, mainly in Morocco and Algeria, further swarms reached the Sahelian countries between May and July. Many of these moved progressively east, reaching Chad and the Sudan in May, and northern Ethiopia in late July. These swarms spread out over very large areas and were extremely difficult to control. Thirdly, widespread and abundant monsoon rainfalls provided favourable breeding conditions, and since July there has been breeding in a broad belt extending from Mauritania to northern Ethiopia.
4. Most of the early breeding took place in or close to agricultural areas, and large ground campaigns involving farmers were organized which prevented major crop damage. The rains were also prolonged and, as a result, the swarms produced at the end of the first generation matured rapidly and a second generation of breeding has started. In many countries, this latest breeding is to the north of the area of the earlier breeding. In the west, however, there was a significant westward extension of the infested area and Senegal was invaded by large dense swarms in late September; while in the east, Djibouti was also invaded in late September, marking the beginning of the forecasted invasion of the Horn of Africa.
5. The area in which the desert locust can now be found thus extends from Senegal and Mauritania to the Sudan, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Yemen. This covers an area of some 8 million square kilometres or about one third of the total invasion area of the desert locust.
6. The fact that swarms have already reached the countries around the Red Sea strongly suggests that there will be widespread breeding during the winter around

the Red Sea and in the Horn of Africa and, later, in the interior of the Arabian peninsula, leading to the possibility of an invasion in Pakistan and India in mid-1989.

7. It is also possible that Egypt and northern Arabia will be invaded before the end of the year and it is almost certain that there will be a further invasion of north-west Africa in November 1988, possibly on a scale even larger than in 1987.

8. Given the enormous area over which the desert locust has already spread, it is quite evident that the plague cannot be stopped in the near future. The control strategy must therefore have as its twin major objectives, the limitation of damage to agricultural crops and the destruction of as many infestations, hopper and adult, as possible, in order to reduce a further spread of the plague.

9. Aerial and ground campaigns have been conducted against all the major infestations south of the Sahara with both objectives in mind. Over 1 million ha have already been sprayed in the Sahel, the Sudan and Ethiopia, but a further 2 million ha may have to be treated in the next two to three months. This total may rise to as much as 12 million ha by June 1989, approximately the end of the spring breeding season.

10. So far, major crop damage has been prevented in most countries, but recent reports of serious damage to rice in Senegal emphasized that the high risk to crops posed by the desert locust can materialize very rapidly.

11. The control campaigns have already been costly: in north-west Africa, the combined total expenditure by the Governments of the Maghreb countries and by the donors was over \$100 million. In the Sahel, the total expenditure may reach \$50 million by the end of 1988. By mid-1989, further equipment and supplies and personnel services may cost an additional \$100 million.

12. The Governments of the affected countries have demonstrated their commitment to the campaigns and donors have been very generous in their contributions. Why then have the campaigns not yet terminated the plague?

13. Firstly, there was a succession of good rains which have provided excellent conditions for the locust to breed, so that even those populations which have been reduced by control measures have been able to increase again.

14. Secondly, many of the breeding areas were in remote or inaccessible areas so that effective control has not been possible.

15. Thirdly, the pesticides used in the campaigns are not persistent, rendering it difficult or, in most countries, impossible to treat all the infestations with the resources available and in the time available.

16. Fourthly, there is a shortage of personnel with the requisite knowledge and experience of applying modern insecticidal techniques against locusts, a natural result of 25 years without major plagues. It means that every effort must be made to train a new generation of locust control personnel.

17. Termination of the plague will become even more important if larger populations reach major agriculture areas and if a succession of catastrophes is to be avoided.

18. FAO, through its Emergency Centre for Locust Operations, continues to co-ordinate the campaign and, together with the affected countries, analyses the development of the situation, evaluates the needs and works closely with all donors to ensure the necessary support. These activities are mainly focused on emergency operations, but it is well recognized that further research is necessary to improve existing methods of locust survey and control, to find alternative methods of control and also to accelerate longer-term predictions; for it is certain that, unless the weather becomes less suitable for locusts, the plague will continue to threaten the livelihood of hundreds of millions of people in over 50 countries. These issues will be addressed at a meeting, to be held in Rome from 18 to 20 October 1988.
