

Africa Report by Mary Lalevée

Locusts inflict heavy damage on crops

The emergency measures EIR demanded to stop the locust plague were not implemented—and the consequences are at hand.

“People are walking ankle-deep in locusts,” reported a journalist from the Chad capital, N’jamena. On Oct. 3, an immense swarm of locusts invaded the city during the day, an unprecedented occurrence. In previous years, swarms of locusts have only occasionally come into N’jamena, at night, attracted by the lights. Inadequate prevention and control measures have meant that the locust swarms have bred and multiplied several times during the September rains. As we have documented, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has delayed and obstructed effective action against the locust plague. Now considerable damage is being done to crops by the swarms.

An expert interviewed on France’s Radio International reported that “heavy damage” had been inflicted on crops in Burkina Faso and that the situation was “beginning to be critical,” since the swarms are starting to move south, into the cultivated areas of the country. “The town of Dori was invaded within a few hours by millions of locusts—people were covered with them,” he said. “Peasants rushed out in the middle of the night to save what they could of their harvest.” France and Canada have both sent two planes for spraying, but the expert commented, “These means are insufficient. It is the strategy that is the problem. Prevention was necessary, now it is very difficult to destroy the swarms.” He explained that even to protect the cultivated areas was difficult, as the 14,000 hectares of threatened crop land

was not all in one place, but scattered over a vast area.

The French research locust center Prifas reported in the latest issue of its newsletter that heavy rain in Senegal led to swarms of locusts moving north, thus escaping the only massive operation of air spraying organized by the U.S. and Senegalese army south of the Senegal River. These swarms are now threatening Mauritania.

The small-scale measures proposed and implemented by the FAO—in contrast to the military-style mobilization which *EIR* urged six weeks ago—have proved totally ineffective. The FAO bulletin put out by the locust center in Rome gives the bare facts which reveal the inadequacy of measures taken. The Oct. 6 issue reports that “large areas of southeastern Mauritania, northwestern Mali and Senegal still require treatment against grasshoppers.” On Chad it reported on Oct. 2 that “grasshoppers are becoming a serious threat. . . . Gambia: government concerned with the possibility of more extensive damage to maturing crop. . . . Mali: infestation increasing. . . . By 29/09, some 250,000 ha. had been treated but on 26/09 a further estimated 130,000 ha. needed treating. Pesticide shortages reported.”

And so the list goes on, with Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal, the other countries seriously affected in West Africa. Swarms of locusts have now also been reported in Nigeria. In Southern Africa, brown locusts have started hatching in Botswana and South

Africa, with the risk of a northward invasion as early as December. The South African government has taken steps to monitor the situation, warning the farmers that if they fail to report the presence of locusts on their farms, they will face a fine or a jail sentence.

There are also unconfirmed reports of an “immense desert locust swarm over Saudi Arabia,” which could pose an enormous threat to the Horn of Africa.

All the countries concerned have made urgent appeals for technical and logistical aid, and while the United States and the EC countries have donated pesticides and equipment, the scale of the operation planned is far too small.

African governments have been forced to cut back spending on locust-control measures and on imports of vitally needed pesticides by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The austerity measures demanded by these malthusian institutions are literally killing Africa.

Even the implementation of such measures does not mean financial aid for the countries concerned. A French newsletter *Lettre d’Afrique* has pointed out that Africa is paying the IMF and the World Bank more in interest payments than it is receiving in new credits. The IMF, for instance, granted \$50 million in new loans to the 15 most indebted countries between January and August, while receiving \$760 million in interest and capital repayment from those same countries.

The steady worsening of Africa’s economic crisis is certainly the reason why the idea of a conference on Africa’s debt has been raised again. N’guesso, chairman of the Organization of African Unity and President of the Congo, reportedly “astonished” delegates at the U.N. General Assembly on Sept. 30 by calling for the holding of such a conference.