
Interview: Shmuel Elhanan

Israel mobilized to win against locusts

Shmuel Elhanan is the head of Israel's Department of Plant Protection and Inspection. He was interviewed on Aug. 5 by Marjorie Mazel Hecht.

EIR: There was the danger this spring that locust swarms from East Africa and Saudi Arabia might reach Israel. Are you prepared to defend against them?

Elhanan: I will tell you how we have mobilized. I am not shy, but I am reluctant to say if our plan would succeed 100% or not, because we are only speaking about theory, although it is based on past experience and the experience of others.

Fortunately, we have not had to use the plan in practice, because we haven't had locusts since the end of the 1960s. Only in the last two years have locusts reached the northwest of Saudi Arabia, around the Tabuk area. Now, it has really started to be a danger, because in just two to four hours, locust swarms could reach us.

We are fortunate that for years we have had good reconnaissance in case any locusts were nearby. If we would have had direct contact with Saudi Arabia, this might have been better, or with Egypt, and I hope in the future this will be so. Because when you get the messages from FAO [U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization], sometimes it might be too late.

So what we are always building upon is, first of all, our own reconnaissance. This year when the danger of locusts arose, we turned on the red lights. First we went to the public. And you know the media. It was what we call the "cucumber season" or dead season for news, and the media were more than ready for the red lights, and they pumped up the warning and echoed it so strongly that by the afternoon of the morning that I put out the notice, I had somehow to put out a few of the red lights in order not to overly alarm the public.

Being a small country, we are able to do a few things which I think in larger countries are a bit more difficult, or more complex. For years, we have in this department and in other units of the Ministry of Agriculture ready teams for this purpose. We are training them from time to time on maps and topography and so on, and on civilian radio bands in order to be able to mobilize them immediately.

EIR: So, over the past 20 years, although you have not had a locust invasion, you have maintained the infrastructure to

mobilize. This is the opposite of Africa, where the locust organizations disappeared over the past two decades, because of the lack of funds.

Elhanan: Yes. We have a 24-hour phone line that we publicize that people can call if they see any locusts. Years ago, when we had some locusts every few years, we kept our own vehicles ready, and chemicals, and teams of people who were trained. But we found that we could mobilize fast enough without this. Now, we have a standing contract with air-spraying companies, which can immediately mobilize. In fact, we have more than three companies with agricultural spraying planes—Thrushes, Pipers, and choppers as well, which can be used for reconnaissance or for spraying. They have airstrips all over the country.

We also have a standing contract with a public weed control company, which started many years ago as part of our department. They have suitable equipment for spraying roadsides and public areas by machine. We can use their resources as needed. In addition, we can alert the farmers in nearby areas to mobilize their equipment.

EIR: Do you produce your own chemicals—malathion and fenitrothion?

Elhanan: We produce some and import some. We could mobilize immediately a large amount produced here if we needed it for spraying swarms. As soon as we had the alert, we checked to find out that we had enough chemical materials and we did. So, all this together, our signal equipment, the 24-hour phone, these companies—and, if a very dangerous alert should occur, I'm sure we could have even gotten help from the Army. . . .

EIR: How much territory are you talking about?

Elhanan: Israel proper is 27,000 square kilometers. So really, Israel is small, and that's why, with enough planes and equipment, and with proper use, both in air spraying and ground spraying, and with mobilizing farmers, if necessary, I think we would not need any other special help. . . .

EIR: Unfortunately, in Africa, we are dealing with countries that don't have telephone systems, that don't have infrastructure. And the situation is terrible, because in the Sahel region, the FAO is predicting as much as 1 million tons of food crops lost to locusts.

Elhanan: You have to have the infrastructure in those countries in order to achieve what we have achieved. . . . There is another problem, a fashion of environmentalism. . . .

EIR: And when you combine this with the malthusianism of the FAO, I think you get a picture that the FAO and the environmentalists don't care if these people die; they think Africa has too many people.

Elhanan: May I say that this is a stupid idea, a stupid notion. To say a thing like that, that Africa is overpopulated, is ridiculous!