

Fears for food security and the future of farming families, as Fall Armyworm spreads to Asia

An “invasive pest” that devours more than 80 different plant species, including many staple crops, could threaten the food security and livelihoods of millions of small-scale farmers in Asia, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) [warned](#) on Tuesday.

The UN agency is offering its expertise to farmers and Governments in the region to help them manage [Fall Armyworm](#). The insect was recently detected in India, marking the first time it has been found in Asia, and FAO fears it is “highly likely” to spread, with southeast Asia and south China most at risk.

“Fall Armyworm could have a devastating impact on Asia’s maize and rice producers – mostly small-scale farmers who depend on their crops for food and to make a living,” said Kundhavi Kadiresan, FAO Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific.

She described the arrival of the pest, which has been moving steadily east across the globe, as “a threat that we cannot ignore.”



FAO/Lesotho/Lechoko Noko

Small-scale farmers cultivate roughly 80 per cent of farmland in Asia, where more than 200 million hectares of maize and rice are cultivated each year, according to FAO. Meanwhile, over 90 per cent of the world’s rice is produced and consumed there.

The fear is that Fall Armyworm, which can fly 100 kilometres at night, could chomp through crops year-round, given the region’s “favourable” climate.

Though native to the Americas, Fall Armyworm has been on the march across Africa over the past two years, affecting millions of hectares of maize and sorghum.

It was first detected in Nigeria in January 2016. Two years later, it had spread to practically all of sub-Saharan Africa, with the exception of 10 mostly northern countries and territories.

FAO took immediate steps to tackle Fall Armyworm in Africa and to support countries in mitigating the damage it caused. The agency has supported more than 30 projects on the continent to fight the pest, which can eat dozens of crop species, including maize, rice, vegetables, groundnuts and cotton.

Hans Dreyer, Director of FAO's Plant Production and Protection Division, believes action taken in Africa can also benefit Asia.

"Much of what FAO has already done in sub-Saharan Africa to help farmers and governments better monitor and mitigate Fall Armyworm damage, can also be applied in Asia," he said.

"This includes recommendations on pesticide management, monitoring and early warning, and a practical guide for farmers and government extension workers on how to best manage the pest."

[Militias force nearly 2,000 to leave Libyan capital's largest shelter for internally-displaced: UNHCR](#)

In an appeal for the human rights of families originally from the city of Tawergha to be respected, UNHCR spokesperson William Spindler, said that the exodus happened last week, following attacks by unidentified assailants.

"According to residents, a local militia forced the entire population of Triq Al Matar to flee their homes last week, following three nights of indiscriminate raiding and the arbitrary arrest of 94 residents, 12 of whom remain detained by the militia in dismal conditions."

Until the attacks, Triq Al Matar was the largest settlement for internally displaced people in Tripoli and home to around 370 families. They were originally from the northern city of Tawergha, but fled their homes in 2011, after the battle for nearby Misrata ended, seeking refuge in informal settlements around Tripoli or Benghazi.

After their recent targeting in the Libyan capital, victims sought shelter with relatives or in other settlements for displaced people, according to UNHCR.

Families with cars "are now sleeping in them", said Mr. Spindler, noting that the 40,000-strong displaced minority from Tawergha are waiting to return home

“following an agreement by the parties involved” in the crisis-wracked country.



UNHCR/Tarik Argaz

A house in Triq al Matar settlement in Libya demolished by a local militia to force Tawergha community to leave the area. 10 August 2018.

“All I can say is that they have been subject to prosecution and discrimination, and they have been prevented so far” from returning to their city of origin, Spindler added. “Although now, there are moves that seem to be opening a way for them to return, and we hope that this will be the case soon.”

The development comes amid ongoing factional conflict in oil-rich Libya, widespread instability and a humanitarian and economic crisis, despite the international community’s efforts to provide a platform for reconciliation agreements between warring parties.

“The problem as you know in Libya is that there are numbers of competing authorities as well as militias with different allegiances,” Spindler said. “So this complicates the issue and makes the protection of IDPs and others very difficult...this is a part of the reality on the ground.”

In Libya, some 192,000 displaced people have been living in dire conditions for years, according to UNHCR. The agency is calling for urgent solutions to end their suffering and allow them to return home in a voluntary, safe and dignified manner.

UN chief appeals for calm as Mali presidential election draws to a close

Following the conclusion of the second round of presidential elections in Mali, political leaders in the West African country are being encouraged by the UN Secretary-General to promote a peaceful atmosphere and avoid incendiary rhetoric.

António Guterres's request came in a [statement](#) congratulating the people and Government for the vote, which was held on Sunday. Malians initially went to the polls in late July to choose a new leader.

Incumbent Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, who is seeking a second term, faced more than 20 opponents, including main opposition leader, Soumaila Cisse.

The run-off election was called as none of the candidates secured the required 50 per cent of votes. The final results are not expected for a few days.

The UN chief welcomed measures that allowed voting to occur safely in most of the vast country, amid difficult weather and security challenges in some areas.

"The Secretary-General appeals to all parties to remain calm through the conclusion of the electoral process, and to continue to address any grievances in accordance with the laws and constitution of Mali," according to the statement, which was issued on Monday evening by his Spokesman.

"He calls on all political leaders to continue to promote a peaceful atmosphere and avoid incendiary rhetoric."

UNICEF appeals for end to 'war on children' in Syria and Yemen

Attacks against children caught in the conflicts in Syria and Yemen must stop, the UN children's agency, [UNICEF](#), appealed on Monday.

In a tightly worded [statement](#), UNICEF pointed out that since Sunday, 28 children were reported killed in Idlib and western Aleppo, located in northern Syria.

The death toll included an entire family of seven.

Furthermore, three UNICEF-supported health facilities were also attacked, two of which are now out of service.

“The war on children in Syria is putting at least one million children at risk in Idlib alone,” said the statement, attributable to Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

These latest incidents follow the deaths of 21 children in Yemen last week, killed when their school bus was hit during an airstrike.

For Juliet Touma, UNICEF Chief of Communications in the region, they represent an escalation in attacks on children.

“There’s obviously a war on children,” she told *UN News*, explaining that ongoing fighting means children in the two countries are being deprived of basic rights such as access to healthcare and education.

The Syrian crisis began nearly eight years ago with civilians continuing “to bear the brunt of a conflict marked by unparalleled suffering, destruction and disregard for human life,” according to the UN humanitarian affairs office, [OCHA](#).

UNICEF reported that more than five million children there require humanitarian assistance, with nearly half forced to flee their homes.

Meanwhile, the UN humanitarian affairs office, OCHA, said three years of fighting in Yemen means nearly two-thirds of the population requires some form of aid relief or protection support to survive.

“Across the region there are about 30 million children who need humanitarian assistance,” Ms. Touma said, also referring to the situation in places such as Libya, Sudan and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

“So, children under attack...and that needs to come to an end.”

[Somalia: UN urges steps to ensure future elections not ‘marred’ by rights abuses seen in recent polls](#)

In a [report](#) released on Monday, the United Nations urged Somalia to take steps to ensure future elections are not marred by the human rights violations and abuses committed during the 2016-2017 electoral process.

“Insecurity, weak justice institutions, and an insufficient human rights protection system contributed to the lack of accountability for human rights

violations throughout Somalia,” the report says, looking back at the 2016 polls and calling for prompt action to bolster human rights protections ahead of the 2020-2021 electoral process.

The report – from the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia ([UN SOM](#)) and the UN human rights office ([OHCHR](#)) – details violations and abuses by State security forces, including the police and intelligence agencies, and non-State groups, including Al Shabaab, before, during and after parliamentary and presidential elections held in late 2016 and early 2017.

While it documents the killing of 44 clan leaders and electoral delegates during that period, it reveals that only two of these reported killings were investigated and prosecuted.

As such, the joint report calls for “prompt, independent and impartial investigations into human rights violations and abuses committed in the context of the electoral process.”

In addition, the report highlights repeated attacks, intimidation and other forms of harassment against reporters, human rights defenders and political leaders, noting that this violence “impeded the free flow of information” and undermined “the ability of citizens to benefit from and contribute to democratic processes” in an informed manner.

“As Somalia continues the arduous task of building institutions and constructing peace, respect for human rights must be at the core of this enterprise,” said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, [Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein](#).

“This includes guaranteeing all public freedoms, such as the rights to freedom of opinion and expression, and of peaceful assembly and association,” he stressed, adding that “it is essential that victims’ rights to remedy and reparation are respected”.

Because conditions for universal suffrage were not in place in 2016, a system of indirect suffrage was used with 275 electoral colleges of 51 delegates each. The colleges elected the 275 members of the House of the People, who then elected the new President, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, on 8 February 2017.

While this system allowed for a more diverse parliament, with half its members newly elected and women’s representation at 24 per cent (compared to 14 per cent in 2012), “more needs to be done” for the next elections, said the report.

“Women, persons with disabilities, minority clans and civil society groups had limited or no access to the electoral process as it was a political process based on clan distribution,” said Michael Keating, the head of UNSOM. “Looking ahead to elections due in 2020-2021, we are urging the Government to establish a system of representation that is inclusive of all citizens, based on the one person, one vote principle.”

In addition, given that in 2016 the list of candidates included former

warlords and a military commander accused of war crimes, the report recommends that candidates be vetted regarding their respect for human rights.