

December 3, 2020

The Honorable James E. Risch
U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee
United States Senate
423 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Response to the global locust crisis

Dear Chairman Risch:

The undersigned scientific and academic organizations write to express our deep concerns about the ongoing global locust crisis. We encourage the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations to hold a hearing on this topic and introduce Senate counterpart legislation to that of H.R. 7276, the East Africa Locust Eradication Act. House Bill [H.R. 7276](#), introduced by Reps. Karen Bass (D-CA) and Chris Smith (R-NJ), the chair and ranking member on the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights and International Organizations, would establish an interagency working group to develop and deploy a strategy for addressing the current and future locust outbreaks.

While great strides have been made over the last few decades, progress in reducing world hunger and food insecurity has stalled in recent years, according to the [Food and Agriculture Organization \(FAO\)](#) of the United Nations. In 2019, 690 million people around the world went hungry. Preliminary assessments suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic, combined with the impacts of the locust swarms in Africa, Central and Southwest Asia, South America, and Australia, may add as many as 132 million people to the total number of undernourished in 2020. As you know, food security is tied to economic productivity and political stability.

Global locust outbreaks on this scale have not been seen since the late 1980s. Locust swarms inflict tremendous suffering in many places by devouring crops that serve as food and feed. Unfortunately, the situation in Ethiopia and Yemen, for example, is even graver due to wars and conflict, which are limiting access, resources, and people to combat the desert locust. Once conditions support large-scale outbreaks, locust swarms can migrate efficiently across borders and continents and cause crop losses of greater than 80 percent, making them a significant hunger and global security issue.

While a proactive engagement strategy would have benefited the region earlier in the year, experts predict locust swarms will continue into the spring of 2021, potentially leading to further hunger. The World Bank estimates that, in East Africa and Yemen alone, losses to crops and pastures from the locust devastations could be as much as \$8.5 billion, directly impacting the livelihoods and lives of the populations across the region.

Changing climate and weather patterns are exacerbating the probability and scope of locust outbreaks. For example, increased cyclonic activity of the last few years in key desert locust breeding areas has supported buildup of populations starting before 2019. The deterioration of monitoring and response infrastructure in long-quiet regions only enabled those grasshopper populations to mature and migrate across the region. Furthermore, while locusts have been threats since humanity started farming, soil degradation, combined with changing climate and weather patterns, will likely further exacerbate swarms.

Sustained support by organizations such as the FAO and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have been critical to managing locust outbreaks. However, the COVID-19 pandemic, overlaid on top of ongoing war and conflict, is posing additional challenges to access and supply chains. Due to the complexity and continental scale of these transboundary migratory pests, an interagency coordination effort is essential to develop better technologies that can be adapted based on regional needs along with sustainable strategies from local to global scales.

We appreciate the support that you and Senator Bob Casey have demonstrated in S.Res. 728 and your admirable commitment to the global goal of ending hunger by 2030, specifically calling out locusts as part of that challenge.

We hope your committee will take the next step by bringing greater attention to the current locust crisis and introducing a Senate counterpart to H.R. 7276. We understand that earlier this week H.R. 7276 was received in the Senate and [read twice and referred to your committee](#).

As organizations possessing deep expertise on this subject matter, we stand ready and willing to provide any assistance you or your staff might need.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Sincerely,

Entomological Society of America
Global Locust Initiative, Arizona State University
PlantVillage, Pennsylvania State University

Cc: Sen. Bob Casey
Sen. Bob Menendez
Rep. Karen Bass
Rep. Chris Smith