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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

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FAO Programme on Red Palm Weevil Eradication in the Near East and North Africa Region

Executive Summary

The Red Palm Weevil (RPW) *Rhynchophorus ferrugineus* (Olivier) (Coleoptera: Curculionidae), is a serious transboundary pest of date, coconut and ornamental palms. It is indigenous to South and South East Asian countries and is among the world's major invasive pests that attacks around 40 palm species worldwide causing widespread damage to date palms and other plantations and impacts production, farmer livelihoods and the environment.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has developed a Framework Strategy for Eradication of the RPW. The Framework Strategy creates a charter for cooperation and coordination of efforts at regional and interregional levels to support integrated and sustainable management programmes to control RPW and reduce its devastating socio-economic and environmental impacts. As a follow-up action, FAO developed a regional programme for RPW eradication from the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region as one of the most affected regions. The programme is encompassing the countries of the NENA region and 20 partner organizations. The main outcome of this project is a Regional Programme for RPW Management to assist Members to improve their strategies and programmes of RPW management.

A Trust Fund has been established to finance implementation of the strategy. FAO and key international partners and national stakeholders have identified the main gaps and activated six technical working groups on: (i) Biological control; (ii) Phytosanitary systems - border control, protocols; (iii) Certified propagation material to prevent the spread of RPW; (iv) Monitoring and information technology for early detection; (v) Socio-economic impact; and (vi) Control technologies and enhancing capacities and farmers' participation for sustainable management of the RPW.

The overarching goal of the project is to contribute to the ongoing efforts for the eradication of the RPW in the NENA region. The expected overall result of the FAO RPW programme is to contain the current infestations and spread of RPW in the NENA region, by coordinating the effort to help farmers manage the RPW in order to limit crop damage to a minimum and to avoid a further spread of the

¹ Rescheduled from 2-4 March, Muscate, Sultanate of Oman.

pest. To this end, FAO works closely with its development and resource partners to maximize coordinated results and minimize duplications.

Suggested action by the Regional Conference

The Regional Conference is invited to:

1. take note of the progress of the regional RPW programme and actions that have been taken by FAO and its partners on the management of RPW; and
2. urge Members to take action on the management of RPW and to contribute to the established Trust Fund.

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I. Background

1. The Red Palm Weevil (RPW) *Rhynchophorus ferrugineus* (Olivier) (Coleoptera: Curculionidae) known also as the Asian Palm Weevil or the Indian Red Palm Weevil, is indigenous to South and South East Asian Countries, where it is a serious pest of coconuts. It is among the world's major invasive pest species that attacks around 40 palm species worldwide. The most important host species of RPW are Date Palms, Coconut Palms, Oil Palms, Canary Island Palms, and Washingtonia Palms. RPW is the most destructive pest of date palms that was detected in the Gulf region during the mid-eighties, and has significantly expanded westwards over the last three decades to cover almost all countries of the NENA region, and has reached some Southern European countries in the Mediterranean Basin and beyond. RPW is a quarantine pest in NENA countries as well as in Latin America and it is the object of emergency measures in the European Union. The challenge in management of this pest is mainly due to the inability to detect the infestation in the early stages, lack of awareness among farmers, shortage in experience and extension capabilities, inadequate enforcement of plant quarantine regulations, lack of regional collaboration and lack of knowledge and information exchange related to the pest monitoring and control. There is broad recognition that RPW challenges have to be addressed urgently at national, regional and global levels and that enhanced cooperation between countries and regions is required, in particular to harmonize monitoring and control strategies.

II. FAO Interventions to Assist NENA Countries to Control RPW

2. FAO convened the first international conference on RPW at FAO headquarters in Rome from 29 to 31 March 2017, which consisted of a scientific consultation and a high-level meeting. In addition to the state-of-the-art on recent global RPW research programmes, the consultation covered advances in combating RPW using different integrated pest management (IPM) methods. The conference discussed and approved a Framework Strategy for Eradication of RPW. The Framework Strategy creates a charter for cooperation and coordination of efforts at regional and interregional levels to support integrated and sustainable management programmes to control RPW and reduce its devastating socio-economic and environmental impacts. The High-Level Meeting agreed to the proposed framework strategy and its three components for eradication of the RPW to fight the pest.

3. FAO and the International Center for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM) organized a scientific international meeting on "Innovative and Sustainable Approaches for the Control of RPW" in Bari, Italy from 23 to 25 October 2018. More than 100 participants from over 29 countries from North Africa, Near East, Europe, Asia, North and South America, seven international organizations and eleven private companies attended the meeting. The meeting focused attention on the main gaps to control RPW. The international organizations and the scientific committee agreed to address the gaps by activating five technical working groups (TWGs) on: (i) Biological control; (ii) Phytosanitary systems – border control, protocols; (iii) Certified propagation material to prevent the spread of RPW; (iv) Monitoring and information technology for early detection; and (v) Socio-economic impact. A sixth TWG on control technologies and enhancing capacities and farmers' participation for sustainable management of RPW has been added later.

Red Palm Weevil Eradication Trust Fund

4. A concept note for a five-year Regional Programme for RPW Management in the NENA Region, with a Trust Fund budget of USD 20 million has been developed and shared with concerned Members. The Trust Fund is proposing for governments and partners to commit resources for the implementation of global, regional and national initiatives supporting the implementation of the Framework Strategy for Eradication of RPW that has been previously endorsed with Members in March 2017. The Trust Fund has three major thematic areas: (i) Research and Development of ecologically sound integrated management approaches to eradicate RPW; (ii) Capacity development targeting

farmers and national institutions engaged in RPW control; and (iii) Transfer of knowledge and technology. FAO Members and partners are invited to contribute to the Trust Fund.

5. The Regional Programme will support national efforts/programmes of countries to contain the spread and eradicate the pest. It focuses on the following components:

- Improving policies and phytosanitary regulations to control the spread of RPW.
- Supporting research and innovative approaches for monitoring, and bio-rational and sustainable management methods and socio-economic impact assessments.
- Supporting the capacity development and enhanced farmers' and other stakeholder's involvement, based on socio-economic analysis.
- Facilitating the transfer of knowledge and technology in areas of IPM, phytosanitary systems, promote genetic resources and exchange of certified propagation material free from RPW.

6. The Regional Programme will also create a framework for cooperation and coordination of efforts at the regional level for supporting the integrated and sustainable management programmes to control RPW.

7. During the Sixth International Date Palm Conference (SIDPC), organized by Khalifa International Award for Date Palm and Agricultural Innovation (KIADPAI) in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, on 19 March 2018, a master session was organized by FAO on the importance of using a multidisciplinary programme with an integrated approach to control the RPW.

8. The United Arab Emirates hosted a donors meeting on 9 March 2019 in support of the Trust Fund. The meeting was organized by KIADPAI under the Patronage of His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan Bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, Minister of State for Tolerance in collaboration with the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment (MoCCaE) and FAO. The conference endorsed the framework strategy for the eradication of the RPW, in addition to endorsing the establishment of a Trust Fund to finance its implementation. The United Arab Emirates announced the pledge of USD 2 million to support the Trust Fund and the State of Libya pledged USD 250 000, in addition to the previous pledges from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (USD 2 million) and from the Sultanate of Oman (USD 100 000). FAO received the contribution from the Sultanate of Oman in 2018 and from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 2019 and is looking to receive the pledged resources from other donors.

9. FAO, together with the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA) and KIADPAI launched the Date Palm Alliance in March 2018, at the margin of the SIDPC in Abu Dhabi.

10. FAO has also signed an agreement with AOAD for the development of a strategy for the sustainable development of date palm in the Arab region, which has been formulated following a participatory process and is currently being finalized.

11. A Regional Steering Committee has been established composed of AOAD, CIHEAM, FAO, ICARDA, ICBA, the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) and the Near East Plant Protection Convention (NEPPO), together with one representative from each pledging country (Libya, Oman, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates) and international RPW experts.

12. During June, July, and August of this year, the FAO-Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa (RNE) organized a series of virtual meetings involving the RPW Programme Steering Committee, Programme Coordinating Unit and Scientific Advisory Committee. Participants in these meetings included AOAD, CIHEAM-Bari, ICARDA, ICBA, IPPC, NEPPO, PRS-Spain and Trust Fund donor countries (Oman, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates). In addition to international RPW Experts, technical officers and specialists from FAO headquarters and RNE participated. The meetings reviewed

the status of the RPW Management Programme and the development of the TWG proposals including priority work packages and activities to be conducted, deliverables, partners' roles and distribution of tasks, timeline schedules, participating countries, budget allocations. The meeting noted the remarks, suggestions and expectations of partner organizations and countries.

13. Revised TWG proposals have been submitted and members of the programme steering committee evaluated and ranked the TWG projects, priority work packages, activities and funding allocations based on relevance, feasibility, sustainability and projects alignment and strategic fit to the RPW Framework Strategy among other criteria.

14. National focal points from 15 member countries have been nominated.

15. A project manager has been recruited.

16. A Manual on RPW Management developed by FAO to support the RPW Programme was released in the first quarter of 2019. An Arabic version will be released later in 2020.

17. FAO is considering sending materials and conducting remote training on RPW management methods in Socotra Island, Yemen where the RPW has recently been detected.

Establishment of the Global Red Palm Weevil Management Platform (TCP/INT/3606/C1)

18. An interregional technical cooperation programme facility (TCPf) was launched to support the Establishment of the Global Red Palm Weevil Management Platform with a budget of USD 99 870. The project aimed to improve the RPW monitoring and early warning activities by developing a mobile application for collecting data from the field and a global platform for mapping and analysing the collected data in addition to mapping date palms through the geographic information system (GIS) to facilitate the RPW monitoring process. The beta version of the RPW mobile application "SusaHamra" was released in mid-October 2018 and has been field-tested in Jordan and Oman. Once the first version of the application is released, the global platform will be developed to analyse the collected data. Mapping of date palms is underway for some areas in Saudi Arabia as an example and will be available to be applied in all other date palms cultivation areas.

Technical assistance to Members

19. Over the period 2016-2020, FAO provided technical assistance to Members of the NENA region, namely, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia, to support efforts in these countries to control the pest. Currently, Mauritania is the only country to have successfully eradicated the RPW in the infested areas, as a result of concerted actions by the Government and affected communities, strict follow-up of the protocol and prompt FAO assistance.

FAO technical cooperation programmes on tackling RPW challenges in the NENA region

20. FAO is currently providing technical assistance in many NENA countries to cope with the challenges of RPW to the date palm industry. The technical assistance focuses on developing the capacity of professionals and farmers, improving national pest management actions and introduction of new technologies for detection, monitoring and management of RPW. The following projects have been implemented:

- **Egypt:** The TCP/EGY/3603 "Date Palm value chain development in Egypt" was completed in July 2019. The project action plan included a capacity development programme on RPW IPM. A series of informative leaflets was issued, and more than 4 500 people received training on good practices to control the pest, surpassing the original goal of 750 trainees.

- **Iraq:** The TCP/IRQ/3602 for technical support for surveillance and management of RPW in Iraq. The activities of the project covered one training session in Baghdad and revised the national action plan to control RPW in the infested region (Basra). Furthermore, sustainable control methods, such as an “attract and kill” dispenser were planned for use in the infested area.
- **Jordan:** The TCP/JOR/3705/C3 was launched to support the assessment of RPW in Jordan. The activities of the project covered one training of the trainers’ session on the sustainable strategy for RPW surveillance and management. Furthermore, ten training courses have been carried out in collaboration with AOAD on monitoring and the use of sustainable control measures. The national plan to control RPW was revised to better address surveillance and sustainable management.

III. FAO follow-up actions

21. The following actions will be taken by FAO in support of the regional programme:
 - A meeting of the RPW Programme Steering Committee to evaluate progress and to approve the project’s three-year work plan based on building blocks of an effective national action plan to manage the RPW; this component is to be implemented by each country based on the status of prevalence and severity of the infestation, needs assessments and available resources;
 - The programme steering committee to approve the Actions of the Regional Platform; sign letters of agreement with Members;
 - Organization of the project official launch and coordination of the activities of the six TWGs;
 - A second donor meeting will be organized in mid-2021.