# JNF threatens to sue Hamas in international courts for kite arson damage

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The Jewish National Fund (KKL-JNF) on Tuesday threatened to sue Hamas in an international court for severe damages caused to land it owns in the Gaza border area by incendiary kites sent into Israel, as well as by firing rockets and mortar shells.

Since the “March of Return” protests began along the Gaza border at the end of March, hundreds of kites and helium balloons have been flown into Israel outfitted with Molotov cocktails and containers of burning fuel, setting fire to large swaths of land.

The Israeli nonprofit said in a statement that it intends to recruit international law attorneys who specialize in lawsuits of the kind.

The move echoes longstanding attempts by Palestinians to internationalize the conflict by suing Israel for war crimes in international courts.

“It is inconceivable that the international community would allow Hamas not to be held accountable and pay for its criminal acts — not only against the citizens of the state of Israel, but also against the environment, which has been severely hurt by this criminal environmental terrorism,” said KKL-JNF world chairman Daniel Atar after touring the damaged area on Tuesday.

“Hamas has proved it has no humanity,” Atar added. “Not just toward human beings, but also toward animals and natural resources.”

The JNF also said it was launching a planting campaign involving children from the communities surrounding Gaza.

“Hamas burns forests – we plant them,” said Atar. “We will prove that our lives here are founded on strength and growth.”

Firefighters, soldiers and local residents have worked on an almost daily basis to try to contain fires in Israeli fields ignited by the burning kites.

Israeli officials have said that since the start of the protests at the Gaza border, there have been more than 250 fires in the Gaza periphery, destroying some 17,500 dunams (4,300 acres) of land, the majority of it in nature reserves and parks.

Some 2,820 dunams (approximately 697 acres) of KKL-JNF forests have been burned, the organization said in its statement.

On May 29, the Hamas and Islamic Jihad terror groups launched hundreds of mortar shells and rockets at Israel, in apparent retaliation for the killing of three Islamic Jihad men in a shelling a day earlier. Israeli aircraft hit dozens of sites belonging to the two groups in response.

On Sunday, the heads of the local governments in the Gaza periphery sent a letter to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon and Interior Minister Arye Deri calling for increased investment in the area in light of the precarious security situation.

“In the past week, including last night, almost 200 mortar shells and Qassam rockets have landed in Gaza periphery communities, serving as a painful reminder that the Gaza periphery must manage a fragile and complicated way of life, under constant threat to its residents,” the local mayors wrote.

The JNF, known in Hebrew as Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael, owns 13 percent of all the land in the country and brings in some $3 billion a year, most of it from land sales.

Establish in 1901, it bought land, founded settlements and planted hundreds of millions of trees in Israel. The not-for-profit group also focuses on land reclamation and the development of communities outside central Israel.