Israeli firefighters battle new fires sparked by Gaza balloons

July 31, 2018

By i24News

<https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/israel/180683-180731-israeli-firefighters-battle-new-gaza-fires-sparked-by-gaza-balloons>

Firefighters in Israel were battling new fires said to be sparked by incendiary balloons launched from the Gaza Strip on Tuesday.

The fire department for Israel’s south said 19 fires broke out during the course of the day, attributing all to incendiary devices launched by Palestinians from the Hamas-run enclave.

A helicopter was also used to battle the blazes for the first time.

The phenomenon of kites, balloons and event inflated condoms carrying flammable liquids or explosives began during the months-long ‘Great March of Return’ protests in Gaza.

Authorities say have set ablaze more than 2,600 hectares (6,400 acres) on Israeli territory and local anger has piled pressure on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s coalition to thwart the tactic.

The military has deployed mini-drones which intercept and down some of the devices before they can land in Israeli territory.

“Today we went back to square one. We thought that the terror of the [arson] balloons had finished, that it was behind us,” said the head security officer of the Shaar HaNegev Regional Council in a video sent to journalists.

"We can’t wake up every morning and see that the fires are still here,” he added, “the time has arrived for the State of Israel to put a stop to it.”

Two weeks ago, after two fierce bouts of fighting between Israel and militants in the enclave, an Israeli official told local journalists that Hamas had agreed to put an end the practice.

While the promise has not come to pass, there have been no rocket attacks or retaliatory Israeli air strikes in recent days.

The United Nations and Egypt are both mediating between Israel and Hamas, with Washington’s assistance, to reach understandings and put in place some measures to ease Gaza’s dire humanitarian situation.