**Israel’s southern residents, frustrated with Netanyahu government, turning to UN for help**

By: David Isaac

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The seesaw of ceasefires and balloon fires has left Israel’s southern residents angry and frustrated with their own government. So much so that they are turning to the United Nations for help, an organization that is often criticized for its anti-Israel bias.

Unity of the South, a protest group, posted a short film on Facebook on Saturday night in which one resident, who is made to appear transparent, says: “I’m from a community in the south and I feel invisible… I feel as if the rest of the state doesn’t see me.”

If they do approach the U.N., the move could be seen as a slap at the Netanyahu government, which prides itself on being strong on defense.

“This dismissal [by the government] is something incredible, hallucinatory,” Gadi Yarkoni, head of the Eshkol regional council, which borders the Gaza Strip, told Yediot Ahronot on Sunday. “Our feeling is terrible.”

Tamir Idan, head of the Sdot Negev regional council, also told Yediot, “The government of Israel needs to respond in a meaningful way that will deter Hamas. And that will stop the balloon terror totally.”

Southern residents are planning protests in the coming days.

After fighting 100 fires started by arson balloons last week, Israel agreed to another ceasefire on Thursday night. That didn’t stop another 14 fires on Friday and dozens of balloons from floating in on Saturday.

Since April 2018, when Palestinian Arabs in Gaza launched incendiary devices (first using kites), residents have endured fires throughout the region.

According to Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, between March 2018 and May 5, 2019, 2000 fires were ignited by arson kites/balloons and 8,648 acres of land were damaged. Smoke from the fires has affected air quality and Israel’s environment ministry, after conducing tests, said that the pollution is above acceptable levels.

The residents also might have something new to worry about. On Friday, balloons tied to a Hebrew book with the title “To love Stella” was found. It was a book only in appearance and contained explosive material.

Israeli security authorities estimate that at some point the disguised device was meant to detach from the balloons and fall to the earth, looking for all intents and purposes like a lost book on the ground, waiting for an unsuspecting victim to pick it up.

Old playbook

The Israeli government’s method of handling Hamas violence essentially consists of shrinking and extending Gaza’s fishing zone and stopping and restarting shipments of fuel to the Strip, depending on whether or not Hamas is curbing the violence.

The latest ceasefire reportedly came about because Israel was seriously considering more aggressive action. After intensive contacts on Thursday night between the sides through Egyptian and U.N. mediators, a new ceasefire was reached.

According to an analysis in Sunday’s Yediot, Hamas allowed the situation to deteriorate in the last weeks, despite an unofficial ceasefire in place, for three reasons.

First, Hamas didn’t believe that Israel was going to fulfill its promise to develop an industrial zone that would employ thousands of Palestinian workers from the Gaza Strip.

Second, Israel said that electric lines it would build from its territory to the Gaza Strip (paid for with Qatari money) would take three years. Hamas had mistakenly been informed it would take six months and concluded that Israel was dragging its feet.

Third, Hamas wants to increase its exports from Gaza but blames Israel for delaying two pilot export projects.