Massive flaming kite-caused fire rips through southern forest

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<https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-5278025,00.html>

A massive fire swept through the Shokeda Forest in southern Israel on Sunday evening after an incendiary kite was flown over the Gaza border by Palestinian terrorists.

Two firefighting crews were called to the scene to battle the raging flames as the phenomenon of flaming kites continues to wreak havoc on Israel’s southern residents, with the IDF as yet unable to provide a comprehensive counter solution. Another fire also broke out at the Re’im parking lot.

The forest is visited each winter by thousands of tourists who flock from around the country to participate in the “Red South” festival.

Despite the effectiveness of the primitive weapon being increasingly employed by terrorists from the Gaza border, the IDF has registered some success in tackling the threat.

On Sunday evening, soldiers managed to foil an attempt to fly a flaming kite into Israeli territory that glided the border on the southern strip, causing it to fall near the security fence. No one was hurt in the incident.

Earlier, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu instructed head of the National Security Council Meir Ben Shabbat to draw up a plan to allocate compensation taken from Palestinians Authority (PA) funds for Israeli communities bordering the Hamas-ruled enclave for damages recently caused by the kites.

If the proposal is implemented, the PA will be forced to pay fines for attacks launched by Hamas terrorists and other terror organizations located on Gazan soil.

During Sunday afternoon, flaming kites struck five points spanning the Gaza border region. Firefighters were swiftly able to extinguish the conflagrations, whereas fires in the Or HaNer Kibbutz continued to resist the efforts of the fire crews by the evening.

No injuries were immediately reported in any of the fires but forests were ravaged in the region, charred and blackened by the flames' onslaught.

The first fire broke out in the morning near Kibbutz Nir Am in the Sha'ar HaNegev Regional Council. Two hours later, firefighters managed to contain the flames.

Shortly after, a fire erupted near Or HaNer Kibbutz and spread throughout the vicinity, prompting authorities to close main roads and temporarily block traffic traveling into the city of Sderot due to large plumes of smoke. Four firefighter helicopters were also dispatched to extinguish the flames.

Little time elapsed before another incendiary kite took its toll, causing an inferno in the Simchoni Forest, also in the Sha’ar HaNegev Regional Council. Fire crews were also able to overcome the flames.

Since the kites were first used in April as part of what Gazans describe as the “March of Return” protests, the "aerial terror offensive" against the Israeli border communities has continued with greater vigor, including some 300 incendiary kites flown into Israel's territory, causing 100 fires and decimating more than 3,000 acres of wheatfields.

Last week, the Be'eri Crater Reserve adjacent to the Gaza border, considered to be among the most picturesque tourist sites in the region, with its green landscape serving as a natural habitat for a variety of species of animals, was [incinerated by one of the kites](https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-5272786,00.html).

In addition, millions of shekels worth of damage has been caused to the farmers of the area.

In light of the recent spate of incendiary “[Kite Terror](https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-5272011,00.html)” attacks from Gaza plaguing their fields, Israeli farmers from the region [announced](https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-5272350,00.html) recently that they intend to sue the Hamas leadership for war crimes at the International Criminal Court (ICC) at The Hague.

The incendiary kites from Gaza are consuming not only the agricultural produce and wheat fields of the Israeli communities surrounding Gaza, but also the area's animal population, groves and nature reserves.

The Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA) is [concerned about the animal population dwindling](https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-5277657,00.html) in the areas that where set on fire by the incendiary kites flown from Gaza. The area's birds managed to escape the blaze, whereas some of the reptiles did not.