From green to black: Incendiary balloons leave Israeli farmers with heavy hearts

September 11, 2019

By Shay Davidovich

International Committee of the Red Cross

<https://www.icrc.org/en/document/green-black-incendiary-balloons-leave-israeli-farmers-heavy-hearts>

The hot summer days are especially tense for farmers living in the Israeli towns around the Gaza Strip. The cause of their troubles: incendiary balloons.

These devices, launched from Gaza, have been drifting over the border since the situation escalated almost two years ago.

These airborne incendiary devices often land on farmers’ fields, which catch fire quickly in this dry region. The fires leave huge patches of blackened crops that scar the landscape⁠⁠—and cause enormous financial and psychological damage for the farmers. Sometimes devices land in Israeli towns, endangering property and the safety of civilians who live there.

Travelling through the wheat and chickpea fields in recent months, I met many of the hardworking farmers whose fields are exposed to the balloons. They face a tough dilemma: should they harvest their crops early and use them as food for farm animals? Or wait until they are ready to harvest, risking them being set alight by the balloons? Many decide not to take the risk. The pain of seeing the fruits of their work incinerated in a matter of seconds is too much to handle.

**Daniel Rahamim, Kibbutz Nahal Oz**

“Only a farmer would understand this. I stood with tears in my eyes in front of the burning wheat field and I was helpless. I just stood still, shed tears, cried. It is something you have grown, something you have invested in and have been working on for months. When you go to harvest your crops and see that they are burned before you can enjoy them, it is such a heavy experience. Last year out of 4,000 hectares of wheat, about 1,300 hectares burned down. This year there were fewer fires since we harvested the wheat as fodder while it was still green, so that it did not catch fire. What we did not harvest, burned. How to move on? We move on because we must.”

## Eran Braverman, Kibbutz Alumim

“Last year fields of chickpeas, dry before harvest, went up in flames. In the same field, three incendiary balloons fell, and the avocado plantation caught fire. When the fields burn, the smell is terrible. As a farmer, when you grow crops and see them burn right before harvest time, it does something to your heart. You have been preparing the field since October, fertilizing the ground, sowing it, treating it against diseases and pests, and then the day before harvest, everything is on fire. It's a very intense feeling.”

## Avida Bachar, Kibbutz Beeri

“Since the eve of ‘Shavuot’ [the Feast of Weeks] last year, we have had many fires, sometimes several a day. The fires almost reached our houses. You see the field burns down and it makes you upset. The crops should be harvested, not burned. The landscape should turn from green to yellow, not black. Nature is stronger than any fire. Eventually, rain comes and cleans everything up. But the heart cannot be repaired and in the end, those are the real scars we are left to deal with.”