

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- The Republic of Korea (ROK, South Korea) should accede to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) as a matter of priority.
- Despite not yet being a State Party to the APMBC, South Korea has obligations under international human rights law to clear anti-personnel mines in areas under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible.
- South Korea should establish a mine action authority to assume responsibility for planning and implementing mine clearance.
- South Korea should enact long-considered legislation permitting mine clearance by accredited civilian demining organisations.

ANTI-PERSONNEL MINE CONTAMINATION

The Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) and the Civilian Control Zone (CCZ), immediately adjoining the southern boundary of the DMZ, remain among the most heavily mined areas in the world due to extensive mine-laying during the Korean War and in the 1960s, in 1978, and in 1988.

A National Defence Committee report in 2010 said that South Korea had 1,309 mined areas covering about 118km², including 1,100 "planned" mined areas affecting 20km² and some 209 unconfirmed mined areas covering almost 98km².¹

A report presented to a side event at the 2019 APMBC Intersessional Meetings showed the number of mined areas as almost unchanged at 1,308 containing an estimated 828,000 mines (see Table 1).² According to information provided by the Army's Joint Chiefs of Staff in 2018, 380,000 of these mines were emplaced in 786 sites within the DMZ.³ Mined areas in the DMZ include 771 emplaced minefields which are mapped and 15 undocumented mined areas covering a combined total of 10.03 km². CCZ contamination includes 257 defined mined areas and 176 undocumented sites covering a combined total of 114.79 km².⁴

Table 1: Confirmed hazardous areas (CHAs) in South Korea⁵

	Controlled Protection Zones				
	Total	DMZ	CCZ	Restricted Protection Zones	Rear area
No. of sites	1,308	786	433	22	67
No. of mines	828,000	380,000	389,000	50,000	9,000

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

The southern half of the Demilitarized Zone is controlled by South Korea but under the Armistice Agreement the area between the Demarcation Line and the Southern Line Limit is under the jurisdiction of the United Nations Command (UNC) and any mine clearance activities are conducted with UNC approval.

Mine action in the Civilian Control Zone (between the SLL and the Civilian Control Line) and the rest of South Korea is overseen by the Ministry of National Defence and conducted exclusively by South Korean army engineers. There is no national mine action authority or mine action centre in South Korea. Government ministries have discussed creation of a national mine action authority but as of April 2020 had not decided to proceed and the idea reportedly remains in its infancy.⁶ Although only the South Korean army is permitted to conduct clearance, General Robert Abrams, Commander of US forces and the UNC, has reportedly explored the possibility of bringing in international non-government organisations as advisers.⁷

In September 2018, it was reported that the South Korean army had called for the establishment of an agency dedicated to removing mines in the DMZ with responsibility for planning and implementing clearance.⁸ No action to implement the proposal had been reported by the start of 2020.

South and North Korea agreed in the Panmunjom Declaration of April 2018 to transform the DMZ into a peace zone. Under the Pyongyang Joint Declaration signed in September 2018 the two countries agreed to expand the cessation of hostilities into the removal of the danger of war across the peninsula. They also signed an Agreement on the Implementation of the Historic Panmunjom Declaration, which provided for clearance of all mines and other explosive devices from agreed areas with a view to the joint recovery of remains of soldiers killed in the Korean War. The agreement specified that clearance operations would be conducted for four hours a day in designated times using agreed equipment and that the perimeter of cleared areas would be marked.⁷

South Korea's Ministry of Defence submitted a bill to parliament in 2013 that would allow civilian organisations to remove mines laid during the Korean War.¹⁰ As at February 2020, South Korea's National Assembly had not passed the bill.

LAND RELEASE

Under the Panmunjom implementation agreement, South Korean army engineers conducted clearance operations in the southern part of the Joint Security Area of the DMZ in October 2018 without finding any mines.¹¹ They also cleared several areas round Arrowhead Hill in Cheolwon, Gangwon province, to facilitate exhumation of soldiers killed in action during the war. South Korea said it destroyed 27 mines and 1,479 items of unexploded ordnance (UXO).¹²

In 2019, around 500 ROK army engineers completed demining of 102,688m² of the DMZ around Arrowhead Hill, clearing 255 mines and 5,754 items of UXO.¹³ UNC said clearance was conducted according to international mine action standards (IMAS).¹⁴

South Korean army engineers also continue to clear mined areas south of the CCL. South Korea's last Article 13 transparency report under Amended Protocol II to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), which was submitted in 2019, recorded army clearance of nearly 2km² in 2018 with the destruction of 10,207 mines.¹⁵ Since 2005, the army has reportedly cleared 49 mined areas south of the CCL.¹⁶

- 1 "Find One Million: War With Landmines", *Korea Times*, 3 June 2010.
- 2 PowerPoint presentation by Maj.-Gen. Han Cheol Ki (ret.), Side event to the APMBC Intersessional Meetings, Geneva, 24 May 2019.
- 3 Republic of Korea Joint Chiefs of Staff (ROK JCS), cited in "Mine Action in the Korean Peninsula", unpublished paper by Eum Soohong, member, Korean Campaign to Ban Landmines, September 2019.
- 4 Presentation by Col. J. P. Lloyd, Command Engineer, UNC, GICHD side-event to the UN National Directors' Meeting, Geneva, 11 February 2020.
- 5 ROK JCS, cited in "Mine Action in the Korean Peninsula", September 2019.
- 6 Interview with Cho Jai Kook, Coordinator, Korea Campaign to Ban Landmines, and Eum Soohong, KCBL, in Geneva, 13 February 2020.
- 7 Presentation by Col. J. P. Lloyd, UNC, GICHD side-event to the UN National Directors' Meeting, Geneva, 11 February 2020.
- 8 "Army calls for establishment of land mine removal center", Yonhap, 4 September 2018, at: bit.ly/2xOVUCj.
- 9 "Agreement on the Implementation of the Historic Panmunjom Declaration in the Military Domain", Annex 2, 19 September 2018.
- 10 "S. Korea pushes to allow civilians to remove land mines", Yonhap, 14 November 2013.
- 11 "Two Koreas' demining operations in the Joint Security Area near end", Yonhap, 19 October 2018, at: bit.ly/3fuFawl.
- 12 PowerPoint presentation by Maj.-Gen. Han Cheol Ki (ret.), Side event to the APMBC Intersessional Meetings, Geneva, 24 May 2019.
- 13 Statement by Lee Soonsung, Deputy Director, Arms Control Division, Ministry of National Defence, ROK, at the UN National Directors' Meeting, Geneva, 1 February 2020.
- 14 Presentation by Col. John Lloyd, UNC, GICHD side-event to UN National Directors' Meeting, Geneva, 11 February 2020.
- 15 CCW Amended Protocol II Article 13 Report (for 2018), Form B.
- 16 UNC-ROK PowerPoint presentation at GICHD side-event to UN National Directors' Meeting, Geneva, 11 February 2020.