

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- North Korea should cease all use of anti-personnel mines.
- North Korea should clear all mines from the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) as soon as possible.
- North 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, North Korea has obligations under international human rights law to clear anti-personnel mines in areas under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible.

ANTI-PERSONNEL MINE CONTAMINATION

The extent of North Korea's mine problem is not known. North Korea admitted in 1998 that it had laid mines in the DMZ, a 1,000km² strip of land between the north and south of the peninsula believed to be one of the most densely contaminated areas in the world. Mined areas are reported to be marked and fenced but mines are also believed to have shifted as a result of flooding and landslides.¹ In early 2006, officials commented to the APMBC Implementation Support Unit (ISU) that North Korea had not laid mines elsewhere in the country,² despite fears that, among others, sections of the east coast were also mined.

Under an agreement on measures to ease tensions, North and South Korea completed clearance of the Joint Security Area (of the DMZ) in Panmunjom in October 2018. Additional clearance was conducted around Arrowhead Hill (also known as Hill 281) in Cheolwon, Gangwon Province.³

In 2016, South Korean officials alleged new use of mines by North Korea near the village of Panmunjom inside the DMZ, which is jointly administered by North Korea and the United Nations (UN) Command. South Korea said North Korean soldiers were observed laying several mines on the North's side of the "Bridge of No Return", which spans the military demarcation line.⁴ North Korean forces were also reported to have used anti-personnel mines along the DMZ border in 2015 and 2016, apparently to prevent North Korean soldiers from fleeing to South Korea.⁵

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

North Korea has no functioning mine action programme.

In September 2018, the North Korean and South Korean Ministers of Defence signed a military agreement, the Panmunjom declaration, which mandated North Korea, South Korea, and the United Nations Command (UNC) to "remove all mines in the Joint Security Area (of the DMZ) in Panmunjom within 20 days, beginning on October 1, 2018".⁶

LAND RELEASE

South Korean officials confirmed on 22 October 2018 that clearance of the Joint Security Area in Panmunjom by North and South Korea had been completed.⁷ They reported North Korea had cleared 636 mines while South Korea found none.⁸ The north also reportedly cleared a 1.3km-long mine belt in the Arrowhead Hill region.⁹ No other land release is known to have occurred.

1 Statement of North Korea, United Nations (UN) General Assembly, New York, 4 December 1998, UN doc. A/53/pv79, pp. 8-9; Choe Sang-Hun, "Koreas start clearing landmines at DMZ in effort to ease tensions," New York Times, 1 October 2018.

2 Email from Kerry Brinkert, Director, APMBC ISU, 1 February 2006.

3 Song Young-moo and No Kwang Chol, Agreement on the Implementation of the Historic Panmunjom Declaration in the Military Domain, National Committee on North Korea, 19 September 2018, Annex 2, p. 7, at: bit.ly/2XXbuXd; and "Korean leaders sign agreement for North Korea to take further steps to denuclearize", ABC News, 20 September 2018, at: abc7.ws/2XZM0bq.

4 "North Korea planting landmines at border with South, claims UN", The Independent, 23 August 2016, at: bit.ly/2JTjflq; and "Bridge of No Return: Seoul Accused Pyongyang of Planting Landmines on Border", Sputnik International, 28 August 2016, at: bit.ly/30xQ0Se.

5 "N. Korea lays land mines near border to prevent defection by soldiers: sources", Yonhap, 23 August 2016, at: bit.ly/2YaeT90; and "North Korea plants landmines in DMZ apparently to prevent soldiers fleeing", Yonhap, 14 June 2015, at: bit.ly/2YYNALZ.

6 Agreement on the Implementation of the Historic Panmunjom Declaration in the Military Domain, National Committee on North Korea, 19 September 2018, Annex 2, p. 7; and "Korean leaders sign agreement for North Korea to take further steps to denuclearize", ABC News, 20 September 2018.

7 "Koreas finish removing land mines from border village", Associated Press, 22 October 2018, at: bit.ly/2GhPFVn.

8 "Two Koreas Complete Mine Removal in JSA", KBS World Radio, 19 October 2018, at: bit.ly/2XT18Kk; "Minister: N. Korea eliminated 636 mines from Panmunjom area," Yonhap, 12 November 2018, at: bit.ly/2Nbv2Fc.

9 Powerpoint presentation by Maj. Gen. (ret.) Han Cheol Ki, Side event to the Intersessional Meetings, Geneva, 24 May 2019.