

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- The Republic of South Korea (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. In particular, South Korea should clear all anti-personnel mines within the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) as soon as possible.
- South Korea should enact long-awaited legislation permitting mine clearance by accredited civilian demining organisations.

## ANTI-PERSONNEL MINE CONTAMINATION

The 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.

In 2006, South Korea indicated that about 970,000 mines were emplaced in the southern part of the DMZ, about 30,000 mines in the CCZ, and about 8,000 mines in 25 military sites that cover an area of about 3km<sup>2</sup> in the northern parts of Gyeonggi-do and Gangwon provinces, below the CCZ.<sup>1</sup> A National Defence Committee report in 2010 said that South Korea had about 1,100 “planned” mined areas covering 20km<sup>2</sup> and some 209 unconfirmed mined areas covering almost 98km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>2</sup> 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 but provided no estimate of the size of the affected areas.<sup>3</sup>

An investigation by the United States (US)-led United Nations (UN) Command Military Armistice Commission into a 2015 mine incident that wounded two South Korean soldiers concluded that North Korean soldiers had planted box mines in the southern half of the DMZ along a known patrol route used by the South Korean army. Investigators concluded the mines were recently emplaced, and ruled out the possibility that these were legacy landmines that had drifted from their original placements due to rain or shifting soil.<sup>4</sup> North Korea rejected the allegation, stating it would make “no sense” for it to use mines south of the border and that it only used mines in self-defence.<sup>5</sup>

Table 1: Mined area in South Korea<sup>6</sup>

Total mined areas	DMZ	North of CCL	South of CCL	Rear areas
1,308	786	433	22	67

CCL = Civilian Control Line

## PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

There is no national mine action authority or mine action centre in South Korea. Demining is conducted by the South Korean army, which has undertaken limited clearance of the DMZ and CCZ, and has concentrated mostly on demining military bases in rear areas. 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. The agency would be tasked with planning and executing the removal process.<sup>7</sup>

South and North Korea agreed in the Panmunjeom 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 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.<sup>8</sup>

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.<sup>9</sup> As at September 2019, South Korea's National Assembly had not passed the bill.

## LAND RELEASE

South Korean army engineers cleared the southern part of the Joint Security Area of the DMZ in October 2018. The North informed the South that it had cleared 636 mines; the South said it did not destroy any.<sup>10</sup> South Korean engineers also cleared 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.<sup>11</sup>

Additionally, 635 army engineers cleared 151,738m<sup>2</sup> between March and December 2018, destroying 240 landmines (232 anti-personnel mines and 8 anti-vehicle mines), an increase on the 102,828m<sup>2</sup> cleared and 142 mines destroyed in 2017.<sup>12</sup>

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1 Response by the Permanent Mission of South Korea to the UN, New York, 9 May 2006.

2 "Find One Million: War With Landmines", Korea Times, 3 June 2010.

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

4 US Forces Korea, "United Nations Command Military Armistice Commission Investigates land mine detonation in demilitarized zone", Press release, 13 August 2015, at: [bit.ly/2YilwoY](http://bit.ly/2YilwoY).

5 "North Korea Rejects Landmine Blasts Blame", Sky News, 14 August 2015, at: [bit.ly/2LslKoh](http://bit.ly/2LslKoh); and Statement of North Korean Ambassador, UN press conference, 21 August 2015, available at: [bit.ly/2Z84FTK](http://bit.ly/2Z84FTK).

6 Ibid.

7 "Army calls for establishment of land mine removal center", Yonhap, 4 September 2018, at: [bit.ly/2xOVUCj](http://bit.ly/2xOVUCj).

8 "Agreement on the Implementation of the Historic Panmunjom Declaration in the Military Domain", Annex 2, 19 September 2018.

9 "S. Korea pushes to allow civilians to remove land mines", Yonhap, 14 November 2013.

10 "Minister: N. Korea eliminated 636 mines from Panmunjom area," Yonhap, 12 November 2018, at: [bit.ly/2Nbv2Fc](http://bit.ly/2Nbv2Fc).

11 Powerpoint presentation by Maj.-Gen. Han Cheol Ki (Ret'd), Side event to the APMBC Intersessional Meetings, Geneva, 24 May 2019.

12 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) Amended Protocol II Article 13 Report (for 2018), Form B.