



NORTH KOREA

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) should cease all use of anti-personnel mines.
- North Korea should accede to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) and clear all mined areas as a matter of priority.

CONTAMINATION

The precise extent of the mine problem in North Korea is not known. North Korea admitted in 1998 that it had laid mines in the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) between the north and south of the peninsula. The affected areas are reported to be marked and fenced.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.

In April 2018, the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un, and the South Korean president, Moon Jae-in, met and issued a statement promising to bring “lasting peace” to the peninsula with a commitment to denuclearisation and to ending hostilities, turning the DMZ into a peace zone.³ In June 2018, President Moon Jae-in called for an inter-Korean operation to excavate the remains of soldiers in the DMZ killed in the 1950–53 Korean War.⁴ In September 2018, the North Korean and South Korean Ministers of Defence signed a military agreement, the Panmunjom declaration, which mandates that North Korea, South Korea and the United Nations Command (UNC) “will remove all mines in the Joint Security Area

(of the DMZ) in Panmunjom within 20 days, beginning on October 1, 2018”.⁵ 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.⁶ North Korea were reported to have cleared five mines while South Korea found none.⁷ Mine clearance will also take place from 1 October to 30 November 2018 in Cheolwon, Gangwon province, to enable joint recovery of the bodily remains of soldiers, and to enable the establishment of an inter-Korean road within the joint recovery site.⁸

In 2016, as in the previous year, there were reports of new use of mines by North Korea, in areas both on its side of the DMZ, and in those patrolled by South Korea. On 23 August, for instance, South Korean officials reported that North Korea had planted mines near the village of Panmunjom, which is jointly administered by North Korea and the United Nations (UN) Command inside the DMZ. A South Korean official stated “the North Korean’s military was seen laying several landmines last week on the North’s side of the Bridge of No Return”, which spans the military demarcation line.⁹ The UN

Command “strongly condemned” any action by North Korea that jeopardises the safety of personnel in the DMZ, but indicated it would not speculate on the North’s actions.¹⁰

In August 2015, two South Korean soldiers were seriously wounded in a mine blast while conducting a routine patrol inside the DMZ near the town of Paju, 50km north of Seoul.¹¹ The US-led UN Command Military Armistice Commission sent a multi-national Special Investigation Team to examine the incident, which concluded “the North Korean People’s Army violated paragraphs 6, 7 and 8 of the Armistice Agreement by emplacing wooden box land mines along a known Republic of Korea patrol route in the southern half of the Demilitarized Zone, injuring two Republic of Korea soldiers. Additionally, the investigation determined that the devices were recently emplaced, and ruled out the possibility that these were legacy landmines which had drifted from their original placements due to rain or shifting soil”.¹² North Korea rejected the allegation, stating it would make “no sense” for it to use landmines south of the border and that it only used mines in self-defence.¹³

In June 2015, it was also reported to the media by a South Korean official that North Korean forces had been using anti-personnel mines along the DMZ border “for the past couple of months”, ostensibly to prevent North Korean soldiers from fleeing to South Korea.¹⁴

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

North Korea has no functioning mine action programme.

LAND RELEASE

No release of mined area is believed to have taken place in 2017, similar to earlier years.

ARTICLE 5 COMPLIANCE

North Korea is not a state party to the APMBC, but nonetheless has obligations under international human rights law to protect life, which requires the clearance of mines in areas under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible.

1 Statement of North Korea, United Nations (UN) General Assembly, New York, 4 December 1998, UN doc. A/53/pv79, pp. 8–9.

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

3 “North and South Korean leaders promise ‘lasting peace’ for peninsula”, *The Guardian*, 27 April 2018, at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/27/north-south-korea-summit-leaders-promise-lasting-peace-denuclearisation-kim-jong-un-moon-jae-in>.

4 “S. Korea’s first mine-clearing tank wins battle suit”, *Aju Business Daily*, 9 July 2018, at: <http://www.ajudaily.com/view/20180709110922386>.

5 Agreement on the Implementation of the Historic Panmunjom Declaration in the Military Domain, Song Young-moo and No Kwang Chol, 19 September 2018, Annex 2, p. 7, at: <https://www.ncnk.org/resources/publications/agreement-implementation-historic-panmunjom-declaration-military-domain.pdf>; and “Korean leaders sign agreement for North Korea to take further steps to denuclearize”, *ABC News*, 20 September 2018, at: <https://abc7chicago.com/korean-leaders-sign-agreement-for-north-korea-to-take-further-steps-to-denuclearize/4281506/>.

6 “Koreas finish removing land mines from border village”, *Associated Press*, 22 October 2018, at: <https://www.apnews.com/6ab59a08c6e347bba1ab1a767b3fc368>.

7 “Two Koreas Complete Mine Removal in JSA”, *KBS World Radio*, 19 October 2018, at: http://world.kbs.co.kr/service/news_view.htm?lang=e&Seq_Code=140124.

8 Agreement on the Implementation of the Historic Panmunjom Declaration in the Military Domain, Song Young-moo and No Kwang Chol, 19 September 2018, Annex 3, p. 9.

9 “North Korea planting landmines at border with South, claims UN”, *The Independent*, 23 August 2016, at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/north-korea-planting-landmines-border-with-south-un-claims-a7205241.html>; and “Bride of No Return: Seoul Accused Pyongyang of Planting Landmines on Border”, *Sputnik International*, 28 August 2016, at: <https://sputniknews.com/asia/20160823/1044569788/seoul-accuses-pyongyang-planting-landmines.html>.

10 Ibid.

11 “South Korea Accuses the North After Land Mines Maim Two Soldiers in DMZ”, *The New York Times*, 10 August 2012, at: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/11/world/asia/north-korea-placed-mines-that-maimed-2-south-korean-soldiers-at-dmz-seoul-says.html?_r=0; and J. Park, “South Korea condemns North on land mine blast, vows retaliation”, *Reuters*, 10 August 2015, at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-southkorea-northkorea-mines-idUSKCN0QF07A20150810>.

12 US Forces Korea, “United Nations Command Military Armistice Commission Investigates land mine detonation in demilitarized zone”, Press release, 13 August 2015, at: <http://www.usfk.mil/Media/Press-Releases/Article/613531/united-nations-command-military-armistice-commission-investigates-land-mine-det/>.

13 “North Korea Rejects Landmine Blasts Blame”, *Sky News*, 14 August 2015, at: <http://news.sky.com/story/north-korea-rejects-landmine-blasts-blame-10349417>; and Statement of North Korea’s Ambassador, UN press conference, 21 August 2015, available at: <https://www.scribd.com/doc/275521285/North-Korea-Ambassador-s-August-21-2015-Opening-Statement-at-UN-Press-Conference>.

14 “North Korea plants landmines in DMZ apparently to prevent soldiers fleeing”, *Yonhap*, 14 June 2015, at: <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2015/06/14/0301000000AEN20150614000700315.html>.