



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 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.

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, ISU, 1 February 2006.

On 23 August 2016, South Korean officials reported that North Korea had planted landmines 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.³ The UN Command stated it “strongly condemns” 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.⁴

On 4 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.⁵ 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”.⁶ 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.⁷

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.⁸

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

North Korea has no functioning mine action programme.

LAND RELEASE

No release of mined area is believed to have taken place in 2015, as in earlier years.

ARTICLE 5 COMPLIANCE

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

3 K. Tong Hyung, “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 “Bridge 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>.

4 Ibid.

5 C. Sang-Hun, “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>.

6 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/>.

7 “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>.

8 “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>.