



SOUTH KOREA

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.
- South Korea should clear all anti-personnel mines from the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) as soon as possible.

CONTAMINATION

The Korean War left mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) in southern Korea, and because of a security threat, South Korea laid barrier minefields along the DMZ separating it from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the north (North Korea).

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 3km² in the northern parts of Gyeonggi-do and Gangwon provinces, below the CCZ.¹ Previously, a report by the National Defence Committee in 2010 said that South Korea had about 1,100 "planned" mined areas covering 20km² and some 209 unconfirmed mined areas covering 97.82km².²

South Korea has also had to contend periodically with wooden box mines carried by flood water from North Korea during the rainy season. An incident was reported in July 2017, when a wooden mine was found and destroyed on a small island along the maritime border by the South Korean navy during a sweep for displaced box mines after heavy rains.³ In June 2016, South Korean military officials reported that close to 260 North Korean wooden box mines had washed up along the border region in 2010–15.⁴

In 2016, as in the previous year, South Korea made allegations of new anti-personnel mine use by North Korea. On 23 August 2016, South Korean officials reported that the North had planted mines near the village of Panmunjom inside the DMZ, which is jointly administered by North Korea and the United Nations (UN) Command. 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. The UN Command stated it "strongly condemns" any action by North Korea that jeopardises the safety of personnel in the DMZ, but would not speculate on the North's actions.⁵

Previously, in 2015, two South Korean soldiers were seriously wounded in a landmine blast while conducting a routine patrol inside the DMZ near the town of Paju, 50km north of Seoul.⁶ 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.”⁷ 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.⁸

It was also reported in the media in 2016 and 2015 that North Korean forces had been using anti-personnel mines along the DMZ border, apparently to prevent North Korean soldiers from fleeing to South Korea.⁹

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 2013, the Ministry of Defence said it had submitted a bill on mines to the parliament to allow civilian organisations to remove mines laid during the Korean War, in order to facilitate ongoing military clearance. “The bill is aimed at making legal grounds and a process to allow both the military and civilians to remove mines so as to protect lives and the property of people,” the Ministry said in a press release.¹⁰ As at September 2017, South Korea’s National Assembly had not passed the bill.

LAND RELEASE

In its latest Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) Amended Protocol II Article 13 transparency report for calendar year 2016, South Korea reported that 362 military deminers had cleared a total of 191,019m² and destroyed 134 mines, at a cost of US\$1.12 million.¹¹

Previously, in 2015, South Korea reported clearing 62,471m² and removing “approx. 364 mines”.¹²

ARTICLE 5 COMPLIANCE

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

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 2 K. Chang-Hoon, “Find One Million: War With Landmines”, *Korea Times*, 3 June 2010.
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 4 “Military found nearly 260 washed up N.K. landmines in past 6 years”, *Yonhap*, 7 June 2016, at: <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2016/07/06/0401000000AEN20160706010100315.html>.
 5 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>.
 6 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/2012/08/11/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>.

7 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/>.
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 9 “N. Korea lays land mines near border to prevent defection by soldiers: sources”, *Yonhap*, 23 August 2016, at: <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2016/08/23/36/0301000000AEN20160823007200315F.html>; and “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>.
 10 “S. Korea pushes to allow civilians to remove land mines”, *Yonhap*, 14 November 2013.
 11 CCW Amended Protocol II Article 13 Report (for 2016), Form B.
 12 CCW Amended Protocol II Article 13 Report (for 2015), Form B.