

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- The Republic of Korea (South Korea) should accede to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) as a matter of priority.
- South Korea should establish a national mine action authority to assume responsibility for planning and implementing mine clearance.
- South Korea should enact long-considered legislation permitting mine clearance by accredited civilian demining organisations.
- South Korea should clear anti-personnel mines in areas under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible, consonant with its obligations under international human rights law.

UNDERSTANDING OF AP MINE CONTAMINATION

The Demilitarised Zone (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.

The Army's Joint Chiefs of Staff disclosed in October 2020 that South Korea had 1,308 confirmed hazardous areas (CHA) affecting a little over 128km² (see Table 1), 8% more than the area of contamination identified by the National Defence Committee in a 2020 report.¹

Table 1: Confirmed hazardous areas (CHAs) in South Korea (at October 2020)²

	Controlled Protection Zones				
	Total	DMZ	CCZ	Restricted Protection Zones	Rear area
No. of sites	1,308	786	433	22	67
Area (m ²)	128,160,000	10,030,000	114,780,000	2,470,000	880,000
No. of mines	828,000	380,000	389,000	50,000	9,000

Contamination data were largely unchanged from previous years. A report presented to a side event at the 2019 APMBC Intersessional Meetings also recorded 1,308 mined areas containing an estimated 828,000 mines.³ Information provided by the Army's Joint Chiefs of Staff in 2018, also showed 380,000 of these mines were emplaced in 786 sites within the DMZ.⁴ Mined areas in the DMZ include 771 emplaced minefields which are mapped and 15 undocumented mined areas covering a total of 10.03 km². CCZ contamination includes 257 defined mined areas and 176 undocumented sites covering a total of 114.79km².⁵

The Ministry of National Defence previously reported that it had emplaced some 53,000 M14 anti-personnel mines around 37 rear air defence bases between 1960 and 1980 and in demining operations conducted between 1998 and 2007 it had cleared around 50,000 of these mines. However, floods, landslides and changes in topography were believed to have caused mines to move and some 3,000 mines remained to be found and destroyed.⁶

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

The southern half of the Demilitarized Zone is controlled by South Korea but under the Armistice Agreement the area between the Demarcation Line and the Southern Line Limit is under the jurisdiction of the United Nations Command (UNC) and any mine clearance activities are conducted with UNC approval.

Mine action in the Civilian Control Zone (between the SLL and the Civilian Control Line) and the rest of South Korea is overseen by the Ministry of National Defence and conducted exclusively by South Korean army engineers.

There is no national mine action authority or mine action centre in South Korea and only the South Korean army is permitted to conduct clearance. Government ministries have discussed creation of a mine action authority but as of April 2021 had not decided whether or not to proceed and the idea reportedly remains in its infancy.⁷ 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.⁸ As at April 2021, the National Assembly had not passed the bill. General Robert Abrams, Commander of US forces and the UNC, has reportedly explored the possibility of bringing in international non-governmental organisations as advisers.⁹

A document submitted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the National Assembly in 2020 identifying obstacles to mine

action pointed to the absence of an institutional framework and the lack of a legal basis for mine clearance which can only be conducted with the consent of land owners. The memo said existing demining capacity was overburdened and recommended expanding capacity from one brigade to two or three brigades. It also called for quality assurance and post-clearance analysis.¹⁰

The Ministry of National Defence announced in 2019 that it had embarked on a three-year programme to complete the survey and clearance of rear areas by October 2021. The proposal called for expanding demining capacity from six teams with 200 personnel to 31 teams with 1,200 personnel. It also called for investment in upgrading detectors to detect plastic mines and in mechanical assets.¹¹ The extent to which the Army has progressed in implementing the plan remains unclear. Funding to support the programme appears to have become available only in the last year. A Joint Chiefs of Staff memo to the National Assembly reported an increase in the budget for mine clearance from KRW 180 million (approximately US\$161,000) in 2018 to KRW 330 million in 2019 and KRW 8.2 billion (US\$7.3 million) in 2020.¹²

The Army was reported in February 2021 to have launched a two-week course training deminers to standards that for the first time are IMAS-compatible. The Army reportedly planned to train 500 people on the course during 2021.¹³

LAND RELEASE

South Korea reported the clearance of 158 mines and 2,410 items of unexploded ordnance in the course of operations to exhume remains of Korean War casualties around Arrowhead Hill in the DMZ in 2020. North Korea did not conduct clearance in the DMZ as provided for in the September 2018 Panmunjom Declaration.¹⁴

The Army said in February 2021 that it planned to conduct mine clearance in 42 areas covering 630,000m² by November 2021. The areas targeted for clearance included 36 rear air-defence sites south of the CCZ.¹⁵

1 Yoo Hyun-min, "828,000 landmines buried nationwide...59,000 even south of the Civilian Control Line", *Yonhap News Agency*, 9 October 2020.

2 Ibid.

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

4 South Korea Joint Chiefs of Staff (ROK JCS), cited in "Mine Action in the Korean Peninsula", unpublished paper by Eum Soohong, member, Korean Campaign to Ban Landmines, September 2019.

5 United Nations Command (UNC) South Korea PowerPoint presentation for Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) side-event to the UN National Directors' Meeting, Geneva, 11 February 2020.

6 Ministry of National Defence press release, 16 October 2019.

7 Interview with Cho Jai Kook, Coordinator, Korea Campaign to Ban Landmines, and Eum Soohong, KCBL, in Geneva, 13 February 2020.

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

9 Presentation by Col. J. P. Lloyd, UNC, GICHD side-event to the UN National Directors' Meeting, Geneva, 11 February 2020.

10 Memo from the Engineering Department, Joint Chiefs of Staff, to the National Assembly (unofficial translation by Eum Soohong, KCBL, October 2020).

11 Ministry of National Defence press release, 16 October 2019.

12 Memo from the Engineering Department, Joint Chiefs of Staff, to the National Assembly (unofficial translation by Eum Soohong, KCBL), October 2020.

13 Choi Han-young, "The first military to meet international standards and train mine removal experts", *Kookbang*, 5 February 2021.

14 Jung Bitna, "Unearthed 143 remains of this year's Arrowhead Bill", *Yonhap News Agency*, 19 November 2020.

15 Maeng Soo-yeol, "Civil control line, public works, rear air defense camp mine removal operation", *Kookbang*, 1 April 2021.