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PROFILES

S. KOREA

The Republic of Korea (ROK)


HISTORY

The Republic of Korea (ROK) — South Korea — was established on August 15, 1948. The new government has since endured a presidential overthrow, military rule and presidential assassination. The fifth constitution of the Republic was adopted in 1980, crowning the Fifth Republic. The first non-military president in 30 years was elected in December of 1992.

LANDMINES/UXO OVERVIEW

The ROK produces two known kinds of mines. In 1999, the country produced 1,363 new AP mines. There is no evidence that the government has exported any mines. After a 1998 meeting with Vice Minister of Defense Lee Jung-Rin, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) estimated that the number of landmines in the ROK stockpile is at least 2 million. Since then, however, the government has stated that all of its dumb (non-self-destructing) mines are now detectable.

The Korean War left behind what is possibly the most heavily mined area in the world. The ROK government has reported an estimated 1.12 million mines are buried in the 151-mile Demilita-



rized Zone (DMZ) along the North-South Korean border. The buried mines are not adequately mapped and are difficult to detect.

CASUALTIES

The Korean War resulted in thousands of landmine casualties to both soldiers and civilians. People continue to be victimized by landmines in the ROK. There were 91 reported victims between 1992 and 1999. Of this number, 34 were civilians. The actual number of victims is likely higher since there are unreported victims. The Korea Campaign to Ban Landmines (KCBL) estimates that since the end of the war there have been more than 1,000 civilian mine victims and 2,000-3,000 military mine victims.

DEMINEING

The ROK Air Force began a multi-year program in April 1999 to remove landmines laid in and around 10 Air Force defense sites. The first phase targeted four sites on the outskirts of Seoul. A large concern in mine clearance is the

threat of floods and landslides that wash mines from storage areas or fields into open civilian areas. Since the 1980s, only 10 percent of 1,430 washed away mines have been recovered.

The Defense Ministry has said it will clear mines through 2003 in five rear areas: Mount Sumo, Mount Homyong, Kachang, Kwangchong and Anhung. The KCBL has produced a brochure and picture books and has conducted workshops and campaigns to promote mine awareness. There is no government-sponsored mine awareness program to date.

REALITY CHECK

ROK has one of the most vocal governments about the legitimacy and military necessity of AP landmines. ROK officials have said that landmines are the best deterrent against attacks by tanks and special troops from the North. Although they acknowledge the humanitarian consequences of AP mines, they firmly believe that they are under the constant threat of war, and therefore do not have the option of a complete ban of AP mines.

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