

Cambodian campaigners urge land mine ban

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SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA -- While in Seoul for an award ceremony March 13, campaigners from Cambodia urged the South Korean government to ban using land mines and to scrap its stockpiles of mines and cluster munitions.

Mercy Sr. Denise Coghlan, founder of the Cambodia Campaign to Ban Landmines, and one of its activists, Song Kosal, were recipients of this year's Tji Hak-soon Justice and Peace Award.

"We beg the world to stop making and laying mines and to help us rebuild our country," they said during their acceptance speech.

The award, named after the former bishop of Wonju and presented by the Tji Hak-soon Justice and Peace Foundation since 1997, annually recognizes men, women or organizations "who, at great personal risk, stand up to oppression, in pursuit of justice, peace and respect for human rights," according to the foundation's website.

Kosal lost both legs after stepping on a mine in Battambang -- the most heavily mined province in Cambodia -- when she was 5 years old. Coghlan has worked in Cambodia for more than 20 years, currently serving as director of the country's Jesuit Refugee Service.

The foundation's chairman, Msgr. Philip Kim Byeong-sang, presented the pair with medals and a \$10,000 prize.

Prior to the award ceremony, the two attended a press conference organized by groups opposed to weapons of mass destruction and held outside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in downtown Seoul.

"The Korean government, which is a known producer, importer, exporter and stockpiler of the weapons, has not signed the Convention on Cluster Munitions or the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty due to the unique security situation on the Korean peninsula," the pair said in statement.

"The government has to sign the treaty and the convention and stop making these weapons immediately," they urged.

South Korea and North Korea are still technically at war after signing a cease-fire agreement that ended hostilities in the Korean War (1950-53). China, Russia and the United States have yet to sign the mine treaty.

The Cambodian Campaign to Ban Landmines, established in 1994, enables mine victims to help each other and has contributed in forming global public opinion toward establishing the two international agreements.

According to the Korea Mine Clearing Research Institute, there are about 970,000 land mines buried in the demilitarized zone separating North and South Korea.

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