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North Korea says South Korea fired first

Tuesday November 23, 2010

North Korea said South Korea fired first in Tuesday's cross-border artillery duel, which killed two marines and injured 18 soldiers or civilians on a South Korean border island.

'The South Korean enemy, despite our repeated warnings, committed reckless military provocations of firing artillery shells into our maritime territory near Yeonpyeong island beginning 1pm (1500 AEDT),' a statement from the North's military supreme command said.

The North's military 'will continue to make merciless military attacks with no hesitation if the South Korean enemy dares to invade our sea territory by 0.001 mm', it said in the statement carried by the official news agency.

'It is our military's traditional response to quell provocative actions with a merciless thunderbolt.'

The statement added that in the West Sea (Yellow Sea), 'there will only exist the sea boundary set by us'.

The disputed sea border just north of the island was the scene of deadly naval clashes in 1999, 2002 and last November.

It was drawn by United Nations forces after the 1950-53 war and is known as the Northern Limit Line. The North says the border should run to the south of Yeonpyeong island.

The North began shelling after sending several messages protesting about South Korean naval, air force and army training exercises being staged close to the border, a Seoul presidential spokesman said.

The North's military said the South's 'latest military provocation was a vicious effort to maintain the faulty Northern Limit Line' by frequent naval intrusions across the border.