

South Korea: Lowest Birthrate in the World

By Peter J. Smith

SEOUL, August 28, 2006 (LifeSiteNews.com) – South Korea now claims the lowest birthrate in the world according to South Korea's National Statistical Office, which confirms population data just released by an independent study.

According to the Korean Herald, the National Statistical Office (NSO) has announced that the South Korea's total fertility rate dropped to 1.08 last year, and reports the number of newborns has also dropped nearly 8 percent to 438,000. The fertility rate is the lowest in the world, and broke South Korea's 2004 record of 1.16.

The statistics confirm the ominous data released in the "2006 world census" on August 17 by the Population Reference Bureau (PRB), which estimated South Korea's birthrate slightly higher at 1.1.

The country's birthrate has steadily dropped over the decades from 4.53 in 1970 to the current level, which is half the replacement rate of 2.2 required to maintain its population level.

Even South Korea's neighbor, Japan, has a higher birthrate of 1.25, and demographers estimate Japan's declining population will plummet from its current 128 million people to an estimated 101 million by 2050. If South Korea continues along these lines, its population of 48.5 million will decrease by 13 percent to 42.3 million in 2050.

By contrast, demographers expect North Korea's population with a fertility rate of 2.0 to increase from 23.10 million as of the middle of the year to 26.40 million in 2050.

The NSO statistics show that not only have Korean women given birth to fewer babies in recent years, but the average age of mothers giving birth to their first child has also increased. Many first time mothers have delayed marriage and children due to more active participation in the economy, which has considerably diminished the available window of childbearing years.

For the first time in history, South Korean women aged 30 to 39 gave birth to more babies than women in their 20s last year. NSO data reveals these mothers in their 30s contributed to more than half of the total births for 2005, higher than the 47.7 percent of births from younger women.

The government has unveiled a plan to offer bigger tax incentives for households with two or more children in order to arrest the declining birth rate. The economics package, however, also includes more welfare measures for married couples, as if more day care services, preschool education, and improved child care facilities will be enough to encourage South Koreans to want more children.

Source URL: <http://www.lifesite.net/ldn/2006/aug/06082802.html>

Birth Incentives Get Creative

By Park Chung-a, Staff Reporter 12-29-2006

Local city governments are to push childbirth incentives from next year to encourage married career women to have children.

The government of Yongin, Kyonggi Province, said Thursday that it will give 1 million won to families that have a third child. The North Chungchong provincial government will provide 100,000 won per month for one year to residents who have a second child, though the residents must have lived in the region for more than a year. Also, those who have a third child will be given 150,000 won per month for a year. In addition, the local administration will pay school lunch fees for a third child and any subsequent children from elementary school to high school.

Andong, North Kyongsang Province, will double its monthly childbirth support fee. The current monthly incentive — ranging from 30,000 won to 100,000 won to 60,000 won to 200,000 won. The period of the payment will increase from one year to two years. Sokcho, Kangwon Province, said families with a third child will be given 100,000 won per month for three years. The payment will begin from three months before the birth of the third child. Chorwon, Kangwon Province, will give 300,000 won to families that have a second child and 500,000 won to those with a third child.

Officials from Taejon said Monday that it increased the budget for childcare fees for third children by 20 percent to 720 million won. According to the city administration, since July 2004, when the measure for providing financial support for third child was introduced, the number of beneficiaries has steadily increased from 181 people in 2004 to 537 in 2005 and 952 this year. Taejon has been paying 200,000 won per month to

families with a third and fourth child who are dependent upon private childcare facilities. Regardless of family income, the government will supply 200,000 won per month to these families until the children reach 3 years old. Sosan, South Chungchong Province, is to give up to 1 million won to families with a third child.

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Report: Elder population soars; young women on the decline

JoongAng Daily

December 27, 2006 — The aging of Korea's population accelerated notably in 2005 from five years ago as the number of elderly people surged and the birthrate fell, the nation's statistics office said yesterday.

The number of elderly citizens in the population grew at a much faster pace than the total population in 2000-2005, while the number of women aged 15-49 fell for the first time over the five-year period, the National Statistical Office said in its regular five-year report.

The Korean government fears that a continued decline in the nation's birth rate and greater aging of the population may erode the labor pool.

According to the central bank in October, Korea could face a severe labor shortage in 15 years if the birth rate continues to decline, while a government advisory said last week the potential growth rate could fall to the low 4-percent range from 2011 to 2020 amid the population decline.

The number of seniors, or those 65 and above, rose 29.5 percent to 4.4 million from 2000 to 2005, nearly 13 times the total population growth of 2.3 percent, the state statistics office said.

The number of women aged 15-49 fell 58,000 to 13 million, while the number of married women aged 15-49 declined 413,000 to 7.6 million.

On average, married women in Korea gave birth to 2.4 children in 2005, down from 2.5 in 2000, while the birthrate for married women aged 15 to 49 came to 1.7.

With more Koreans marrying later, the portion of unmarried women 25 to 34 years old soared, while the number of married women in that age bracket plunged. The portion of single women rose by 12.4 percentage points to 37.9 percent, while that of married women fell by 12.7 percentage points to 60.3 percent. From 2000 to 2005, the number of single-person households rose notably due to deferred marriages, the office said.

The number of single-person households rose 42.5 percent to 3,171 households from 2000 to 2005, while the total number of households increased 11 percent to 15,887. The number of unmarried single-person households jumped 49.1 percent to 1,427 households.

An age-old problem is upon us

Editorial, JungAng Daily, December 8, 2006

by Bae Myung-bok

Several days ago, a newspaper carried on its people page a photo of Waldo McBurney, who was honored as "America's Oldest Worker in 2006." From the photo of the 104-year-old Mr. McBurney talking on the phone wearing a bright smile, I did not see any signs of old age, despite the fact he is a centenarian. Experience Works, the largest training and employment organization for mature workers in the United States, annually launches a search for America's oldest full-time worker and invites them to the Prime Time Awards week held in Washington D.C.

This year's award winner, Mr. McBurney, works as a beekeeper on a farm near the small town of Quinter, Kansas. As he maintains over 100 beehives and is also responsible for subsequent sales of honey, he says his day flies like an arrow. The veteran started an athletic career at 65. He did long-distance competitive running at 75. Even nowadays, he says he can join in a 10-mile race easily. That's not all. Mr. McBurney has set records in running, the long jump, discus throw and the shot put in his 90s and 100s at the Senior Olympics. In his book, "My First 100 Years!" he writes that positive living and thinking are the secrets of his longevity. He says, "Lifestyle is the more important factor."

Everybody dreams of living in health, working and enjoying longevity. However, it is not possible for every one of us to be the oldest worker like Mr. McBurney. With the lengthening of people's average life span, the healthy life span has been prolonged, too. As a result, the number of aged people who are physically young and able is growing rapidly. The problem is that there are no jobs for them. Creating jobs for healthy but aged peo-

ple – whose numbers are rapidly growing – while we are living in a society where the demographic trends are moving toward a lower birth rate, is a headache for almost all advanced countries.

Following the province of Ontario, Canada, the province of British Columbia recently abolished its mandatory retirement system. “The number of British Columbians over the age of 65 will almost double in the next 25 years, so it is important we prepare for the demographic shift,” said Gordon Campbell, premier of the province of British Columbia. He also explained it was an inevitable measure for the provincial government to cope with the long-term drain of the workforce and the increase in the welfare budget.

Japan has also become an aging society, where more than 20 percent of the population is over the age of 65. It has extended mandatory retirement from 60 to 62. Japan will again extend the retirement age to 65 in 2013. The United States does not recognize mandatory retirement, according to laws that ban discrimination in employment. In the United Kingdom, compulsory retirement below the age of 65 is considered to be age discrimination.

South Korea is aging faster than any society in the world. In the case of Japan, it took 24 years to become an “aged society,” where more than 14 percent of the population is over 65, as compared to an “aging society,” where more than 7 percent of the population is over 65. And it took 12 years for Japan to become a “super-aged society” from an aged society. In the case of South Korea, however, it is anticipated that it will take only 18 years and eight years, respectively.

Of course, there are people who claim there is no room to worry about jobs for aged people because there aren't jobs for people in their 40s and 50s, or even for those in their 20s. According to a report by the National Statistical Office, among Korea's youth, the importance of finding a proper job has drastically increased from 6.9 percent in 2002 to 29.6 percent this year.

However, it is a problem that an increasing number of people are fired from their jobs only because they are old, although they have the ability and will to work. It is not only age discrimination, but it also not desirable for our country's future. In this sense, it is necessary for us to pay attention to the precedent set by Experience Works. This organization provides jobs for hundreds of thousands of aged people in conjunction with the Senior Community Service Employment Program, supported by grants from the U.S. Department of Labor.

They fill such positions as assistant teacher, home health aide, nurses' assistant, assistant librarian, home repair worker and cleaner. The aged workers work more than 20 hours a week and are paid the minimum wage. By combining the local communities' demand for service with aged people's will to work, the program achieves the “win-win” effect of giving benefits to both sides. South Korea should also be prepared for the demographic shift in the near future. It is time for us to gather the wisdom of the whole community and be prepared to be an aged society by providing the vitality of life to the aged people who have both sound bodies and minds.

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LifeSiteNews.com
Monday August 28, 2006