

South Korea: Lowest Birthrate in the World

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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.