Demographic Implosion Spurs Panicked South Korea to Enforce Abortion Ban (11/09)/ Update

Korea has one of the lowest birth rates in the world now, with an average of 1.08 children per woman. This is well below the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman for developed nations.

As of July 2009, Korea's population growth rate had plunged to a mere 0.266/1,000 population...

As with the preference for sons, a significant number of men must pursue marriage with foreign women, which has caused many difficulties due to cultural differences. These difficulties have also led to more contraception, abortions, and divorce. [HLI Mission Report, June 2010]

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Possibly three out of four pregnancies in Korea end in abortion

The Republic of Korea has signaled its willingness to work to reverse a heavily pro-abortion culture through various measures, including beginning to enforce an abortion ban that has technically existed in the country for decades, in order to address the severe demographic implosion that threatens the country's economic stability, Korean sources report.

The pro-birth effort was announced on Wednesday by the Presidential Council for Future and Vision, and includes proposals to expand benefits for single mothers and provide greater benefits to families with more than two children.

"We have been a society that promoted abortion," Kwak Seung-jun, leader of the Presidential Council, told reporters. "There are few people who realize abortion is illegal. We must work to create a mood where abortion is discouraged."

According to the Korean journal JoongAng Ilbo, the abortion ban - rarely enforced for decades, and even flagrantly violated in the 1960s and 1970s as part of official policy to combat what the government had deemed a "population explosion" - will now be more strictly enforced as part of an overall plan to increase the birth rate and incentivize more women to carry their pregnancies to term.

The Korean Herald reports that proposals outlined in the "Increase Koreans" project outline aggressive steps to give increased support for families with at least three children.

The Presidential Council
proposed that the third-born child of a family be given an advantage in university entrance examinations, employment, and financial support for high school and university tuition. Families with three or more children will be given special interest rates on their mortgages.

As a sign of further desperation, the Council recommended that the government finance artificial insemination procedures up to three times to the tune of 1.5 million won ($1300 US).

Kwak announced that the panel was proposing aggressive measures that had to be taken immediately, and could not wait even ten years from now.

Official data from the Ministry of Health indicates that doctors perform 350,000 abortions per year, while they deliver on average just 450,000 babies, meaning 43.7 percent of pregnancies end in abortion.

However, the actual number of abortions may be at least five times the official estimate. According to the Korea Times, Rep. Chang Yoon-seok of the ruling Grand National Party said that a National Assembly inspection in October found that the number of illegal abortions in Korea exceeds 1.5 million a year or roughly 4,000 babies aborted per day.

If the National Assembly's estimate is correct, the nation of 48 million commits approximately the same number of abortions as the United States, which has 300 million residents. Presuming the numbers of births recorded by the Health Ministry remains the same, that would mean approximately three out of four pregnancies in South Korea end in abortion.

In most cases, the law provides that abortion can only be performed in limited circumstances during the first 24 weeks of pregnancy: incest, rape, critical threats to the life of the mother and highly fatal genetic illnesses.

But South Korea's government has routinely left the law unenforced as only 4 percent of all abortions meet the legal criteria. Between September 2005 and September 2009, only 17 indictments for illegal abortion appeared in South Korea's criminal justice system.

Technically, there are penalties: women who seek elective abortions

face a sentence of one year in jail or a fine of 2 million won ($1736 US). Abortionists can be sentenced to two years in prison. However all abortion providers operate in the open without any fear of punishment.

That may change now that the Korean government is grappling with the fact that their official efforts to discourage the fertility-rate 40-50 years ago through contraception and abortion has proved enormously successful. Thanks to these measures South Korea has turned into a rapidly aging country, with little remaining cultural incentive to have more children, despite the looming demographic catastrophe.

South Korea's total fertility rate is now estimated at 1.21 children/woman, which is far below the 2.1 replacement rate which demographers say is the threshold for population stability. The nation's fertility rate is comparable to Japan, which also has a rate of 1.21, and with a median age of 43 has descended into irreversible population decline.

South Korea is looking to avoid the same fate, but the birth-promotion program unveiled by the government in 2006 has not done much to stem the decline, so the government has decided to increase the incentives package.

But economic incentives may not be enough to overcome the national reluctance to have children. JoongAng Ilbo reports that middle class households on average earn 3.3 million won ($2,860 US) a month, but have about 1.58 children per household. Lower income families, which receive government subsidies, have 1.68 children, and the rich have 1.71 children per household.

The experience of Shanghai may shed light on why government's power to reverse an anti-childbearing culture is far more difficult than imposing it on a population.

Earlier in July, Shanghai's government - concerned about its own coming demographic crisis - announced new plans to relax even further the one-child policy and provide more economic incentives to encourage couples to have more children. However, 7300 couples from one-child households that were already eligible to have two children declined, opting instead to have either one child or none at all.

Chinese message boards discussing the new policy revealed that many Chinese in affluent Shanghai were hesitant to have more than one child, because they had not experienced successful family models with more than one child.

Instead,
individuals from single-child families were even hesitant to have one child - also seen as an inevitable obstacle to having an active social

life - since their own experience ingrained in them how difficult it was for their own parents to raise them.

Seven hundred of Korea's obstetricians, nevertheless, have decided to address the situation by encouraging the government down the path of strictly enforcing the abortion law as well as creating medical peer-pressure among physicians against performing abortion, except when the mother's life is in explicit danger.

According to the Korea Times, the Korean Gynecological Physicians' Association (GYNOB) sent out flyers to 3400 physicians asking for their participation in a national campaign to abolish illegal abortion, held a rally on Sunday, and said that the names of clinics participating in their campaign would be available online at http://www.antidc.org/.

Measures proposed by the Presidential Council will be discussed further by government agencies and a special committee for the Prime Minister before its expected finalization in early 2010.

[25November2009, Peter J. Smith, SEOUL, http://www.lifesitenews.com/ldn/2009/nov/09112512.html]

Shanghai Starts Backpedaling One-Child Policy in Face of Demographic Implosion

http://www.lifesitenews.com/ldn/2009/jul/09072411.html