

A New Decade for an Aging World

World Population Going From Boom to Bust

By Father John Flynn, LC

ROME, JAN. 24, 2010 (Zenit.org).- The United Nations has just published a report drawing attention to the problems being created due to a rapidly aging world population. Just after the start of the New Year the Department of Economic and Social Affairs published its "World Population Aging 2009" report.

Among the main findings of the report were the following points.

-- The current aging is without any parallel in history. By 2045 the number of persons over 60 is expected to exceed those under the age of 15. In the more developed regions, where aging is advanced, this situation was already reached in 1998.

-- Today the median age for the world is 28 years, with half the world's population above that age and half below it. By mid-century the median age will likely reach 38 years.

-- Aging is affecting nearly all the countries of the world, due to reductions in fertility that have become almost universal.

-- Aging will have a major impact on economic growth, savings, investment, labor markets, and taxation.

-- Because fertility levels are unlikely to rise again to the high levels of the past population aging is irreversible and the young populations that were common until recently are likely to become rare during the twenty-first century.

-- Worldwide there are currently about 9 persons of working age to support older persons. By 2050 this will drop to four, with serious implications for pension schemes. As well, the current economic crisis brought about sharp reductions in the value of pension funds.

Further reports

Other recent U.N. reports have examined more in depth demographic problems in individual countries. A study by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), titled "Russia Facing Demographic Challenges," predicted the population will continue to shrink, the Associated Press reported Oct. 4.

According to the UNDP Russia's population has fallen by 6.6 million since 1993, despite the influx of millions of immigrants. The report warned that by 2025 the country could lose a further 11 million people.

The consequences of such a reduction will be labor shortages, an aging population and slower economic growth, according to the UNDP. In 2007 Russia had the world's ninth-largest population. By 2050, the U.N. estimates, Russia will be at no. 15 in the list, with a population smaller than that of Vietnam.

Russia needs to cut its high abortion rate to help reverse the population decline, warned the countries' Health Minister Tatyana Golikova, reported Agence France Presse, Jan. 18.

Golikova said that in 2008 there were 1.714 million births in Russia and 1.234 million abortions.

In their Jan. 20 analysis of Golikova's statement the think tank Stratfor noted that, while the minister announced that in 2009 there had been a slight increase, of between 15,000 to 25,000 in Russia's population, this was due to one-off causes.

The increase was due in part to government incentives for Russians to return to their country from the former Soviet republics. After several years of such immigration the number of Russians willing to return home is rapidly diminishing.

Another cause of the slight increase in population is that the 20-29 year old age group accounts for around 17% of the population and has proved to be quite fertile. The generation born after this group is, however, much smaller.

Missing girls

While Vietnam may be set to surpass Russia, there too abortion is causing severe problems, according to a report dated August 2009, published by the United Nations Population Fund.

The Study, "Recent Change in the Sex Ratio at Birth in Vietnam: A Review of Evidence," examined the problem of sex-selective abortions. Normally the sex ratio at birth (defined as the number of boys being born per one hundred girls), is between 104-106/100.

This ratio, the report explained is, under normal circumstances, quite stable over time, across geographical regions, continents, countries and races.

Studies on sex ratios have revealed an unexpected change, starting in the 1980's in some Asian countries, the U.N. agency commented. "Along with declining fertility, this trend tends to spread

throughout countries with large populations in Asia, thus threatening global demographic stability," the report continued.

In Vietnam the sex ratio at birth for 2006 stood at 110/100 male births. According to the report the change in the ratio started about a decade ago and is currently increasing at around one point a year. So at the current rate of change the ratio might cross the 115 mark in a few years from now, the report stated.

If this trend is not reversed UNFPA warned that by 2025 Vietnam will have a significant surplus male population which will have many implications for the country, and will particularly affect the young adult population at time of marriage.

The "missing girls" phenomenon is well-known in China and a recent report confirmed the continuing practice of sex-selective abortion. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences said that there could be more than 24 million men unable to find a bride by the end of this decade, the Times newspaper reported Jan. 12.

The report blamed the imbalance on China's one-child policy. The use of ultrasound scans has enabled the abortion of female fetuses as parents try to ensure that the only child they are permitted will be able to carry on the family line.

"The problem is more serious in rural areas due to the lack of a social security system," the report said. "Aging farmers have to rely on their offspring" it noted.

According to the Times article one Chinese expert says that by 2006 the sex ratio had risen to 120/100.

Shrinking

Meanwhile, in neighboring Japan the population continues to decline. An editorial published Jan. 15 in the Japan Times newspaper pointed out that estimates from the nation's Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry calculate that in 2009 the population shrank by 75,000, which is 1.46 times the decrease marked in 2008.

According to the editorial the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research estimates that Japan's population will dip below 100 million in 2046, below 90 million in 2055. The current population is estimated at just below 128 million.

As more and more concerns arise over the world's aging population and falling fertility rates the U.S government is in the midst of dramatically increasing its support for contraception and abortion around the world.

On Jan. 8 Secretary of State Hillary Clinton gave an address marking the fifteenth anniversary of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo, Egypt.

In her remarks she celebrated one of the first actions in office by President Barack Obama, which was to lift restrictions on federal government grants to aid groups that fund abortion in developing nations. She also noted that the United States has renewed its funding of the United Nations Population Fund and that Congress recently appropriated more than \$648 million in foreign assistance to family planning and reproductive health programs worldwide.

She promised that even more aid would be forthcoming to enable contraceptives to be offered to all women in every nation. And she also highlighted the work that the U.S. government was carrying out in partnership with the International Planned Parenthood Federation, notorious for its role in carrying out millions of abortions each year.

The current enthusiasm for doing all that is possible to lower fertility is clearly driven by ideological compulsions that don't even stop to consider the economic consequences of policies that have led to a rapid decrease in fertility in a too short period of time.