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Russian Church Leader Calls to End Abortions to Boost Population

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Alexander Avilov / Moskva News Agency

The head of Russia's Orthodox Church has proposed a national ban on abortion to boost the country's lagging population numbers.

Russia legalized abortion in 1955 and has the second-highest abortion rate in the world after China. While Russia's anti-abortion movement has largely failed to change the law, it has gained momentum in recent years, spurred by the rise of the Orthodox Church as a powerful political force.

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"We must first of all remove the topic of abortion to the extent that it exists," Patriarch Kirill was quoted as saying at a pro-life event in Moscow on Sunday by Interfax.

With an estimated 1 million fewer abortions per year, he projected population numbers could

reach 156 million in the next decade and 166 million in 20 years.

Russia has grappled with a demographic crisis in recent years, with its population declining for the first time in a decade last year to 146.8 million.

Reuters contributed reporting to this article.

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