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WOMEN

Morocco blocks Dutch 'abortion ship' from harbor

Morocco has prevented a Dutch "abortion ship" from entering one of its ports. The campaign group that owns the vessel is seeking to inform women about ways to terminate pregnancies.

The Moroccan Navy blocked the harbor at Smir where the ship was scheduled to dock on Thursday in its first trip to a Muslim country.

Naval vessels were reported to be patrolling the waters, with unnamed government official telling the news agency AP that the port was sealed for "military maneuvers."

The Women on Waves group said there was also a heavy police presence in the port. In a message on their website, the group said it would not be deterred from spreading information about safe forms of medical abortion.

"Warships now block the entrance for the ship," said the statement. "Despite this obstacle and the presence of intensive Moroccan police security, Women on Waves will not allow this to prohibit dissemination about the availability of safe medical abortion for Moroccan women."

The group said it had already set up a hotline to give advice about available medicines that could be used to induce abortions at home until the twelfth week of pregnancy.

Abortions at sea

Abortion is illegal in Morocco, except in cases where carrying a baby full term would be damaging to the mother's physical or mental health. As well as providing information, the group said it would perform abortions in international waters.

The group was invited by the rights group Alternative Movement for Individual Freedoms (MALI), although the Moroccan government said it did not have permission to visit the country.

The Women on Waves ship has already visited several traditional Roman Catholic countries including Spain, Portugal and Ireland after receiving invitations from local women's groups.

rc/dr (AFP, AP, Reuters)

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