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Drone to bring abortion pills across the border to Northern Ireland today

A number of pro-choice activists groups are involved in the flight.



Source: Shutterstock/Chaikom

AT 10AM THIS morning, an ‘abortion drone’ will fly from Omeath in Co Louth to Newry, Co Down in Northern Ireland.

On board will be abortion pills. The drone is being operated by pro-choice activist groups the Alliance for Choice, ROSA, Labour Alternative and Women on Waves.

Women on Waves said that:

Several women will be present at the both sides of the border to reflect on the constant travelling of women between countries to obtain sexual and reproductive health services.

It is an all-island act of solidarity between women in the north and the south to highlight the violation of human rights caused by the existing laws that criminalise abortion in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland except in very limited circumstances.

The aim of the drone flight, said WoW, is to “mark the different reality for Irish women to access safe abortion services compared to women in other European countries where abortion is legal”.

The organisation said that its activities are protected by article 10 of the ECHR, the freedom of expression.

At 2.30pm today, a protest will take place in front of the Court of Appeal in Belfast when the appeal regarding the decision by the High Court that Northern Ireland's abortion law breaches the European Convention on Human Rights will be heard.

In Dublin, a protest in solidarity with the activists has been organised for 1pm outside Dáil Éireann.

Socialist Party and Anti-Austerity Alliance TD Ruth Coppinger has offered her support and solidarity to the activists.

She said:

The abortion drone symbolises the constant traveling of women between the north and south to obtain sexual health services. There was the contraceptive train in the 70s and the Abortion Ship. I and pro-choice activists from ROSA and other groups organised the abortion train and bus in the last two years and now the abortion drone. Actions like this by determined activists to highlight the issue will continue until the laws are changed.

“The medicines used for a medical abortion, mifepristone and misoprostol, have been on the list of essential medicines of the WHO since 2005 and are available in almost all other European countries. However, this medicine is still banned and intercepted by Customs in the Republic of Ireland,” said Coppinger. “Both are authorised medications in the UK but are not available in Northern Ireland.”

Speaking on the Nolan Show on BBC Northern Ireland, Kelly O'Dowd from Alliance for Choice said of the drone:

“If you remember in the 1970s, women activists from the south took the trains to the north to buy contraceptives that were illegal in the south, bring them back to the south. And it's really only through direct action that we can challenge the law.”

She said it is legal to do this, as the abortion drone is not used for any commercial purposes and does not fly in a controlled airspace. She said an activist with a license will control the drone.

A previous drone organised by Women on Waves flew from Germany to Poland.

In 2015, the Pro Life Campaign described Women on Waves' decision to send a drone with abortion pills to Ireland as a “cheap publicity stunt that shows utter disregard for women's health and the right to life”.

UN findings

Last week, the UN found that Ireland is **obliged to provide compensation** to a

woman because she was forced to travel abroad to have an abortion.

A committee of experts from the UN's Human Rights Commission **has found that** Ireland's laws on abortion have had a "chilling effect" on healthcare and contributed to the "negative experiences" experienced by Amanda Mellet, who took the case.

Mellet's foetus had congenital defects and Mellet chose to travel to the UK to have a termination.

The UK's 1967 Abortion Act was not applied in Northern Ireland, and it is an offence to take drugs to bring on a miscarriage without doctors' consent.

However, abortion is possible under Northern Irish law in strict and specific circumstances. **Guidelines on the law** covering abortion in Northern Ireland were issued in March of this year.

Women are able to seek advice on access to termination outside of Northern Ireland, and health professionals are allowed to inform women of these services.

Policing

In a statement, the gardaí said:

The position in law in this country is that all abortifacients (abortion pills) are unauthorised medicinal products and the control of medicines falls under the remit of the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA). The garda role is under the Misuse of Drugs and controlled substances as outlined by schedule. Only experts from the HPRA can determine if a "pill" is an abortifacient.

The PSNI said in a statement:

As a police service we respect the rights of people to protest as long as it is within the parameters of the law. Anyone who chooses to participate in the protest should do so peacefully. We continue to monitor the situation and engage with all interested parties. Abortion is a very emotive issue and as police our role is to uphold the law. It would depend on the specific circumstances of an incident as to whether or not an offence has been committed and each case is investigated on its own merit. Police have engaged with campaigners involved in this event.

Read: [Concerns over lobbying and transparency of Citizens' Assembly on abortion](http://www.thejournal.ie/eighth-amendment-lobbying-2830542-Jun2016/) (<http://www.thejournal.ie/eighth-amendment-lobbying-2830542-Jun2016/>) >

Read: [UN: Ireland must compensate woman forced to travel abroad for abortion](http://www.thejournal.ie/un-abortion-human-rights-2813075-Jun2016/) (<http://www.thejournal.ie/un-abortion-human-rights-2813075-Jun2016/>) >

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