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## HEALTH

# The 'Abortion Drone' Is Bringing Women A Safe Way To End An Early Pregnancy

BY [TARA CULP-RESSLER](#) POSTED ON JUNE 24, 2015 AT 11:56 AM

CREDIT: WOMEN ON WAVES

A coalition of reproductive rights group is re-purposing drone technology with a new goal in mind: Expanding women's access to a safe method of ending an early pregnancy.

The world's first "abortion drone" is making international headlines for its upcoming flight, which is planned for this weekend. On Saturday, a small drone carrying packages of abortion-inducing medication will be flown from Germany to Poland, where women are subject to some of the strictest abortion laws in the world.

"The Abortion drone will mark the different reality for Polish women to access to safe abortion services compared to other women in Europe," said a press release announcing the initiative.

Though it doesn't often capture widespread media attention, Poland is a notable exception in Europe, where legal abortion is largely accessible. Within the region, only Ireland and Malta have more restrictive abortion laws. Following pressure from the Catholic Church, the procedure was effectively banned in Poland by 1993. Ever since, tens of thousands of Polish women have been forced to travel to different countries each year to terminate unwanted pregnancies.

Rebecca Gomperts, who founded the nonprofit organization Women on Waves to find creative ways to expand access to medication abortion, is leading this weekend's drone effort. She's ultimately hoping the

stunt will spark a broader conversation about the lack of abortion rights in Poland — as well as potentially expand the use of new technology in the other countries that are more well known for their restrictive laws.

"We're very interested in the new developments around drones," Gomperts told the Telegraph this week. "In a sense it's a campaign to call attention to the reality for women in Poland. But there's a future for it as a delivery model. We might do it in Ireland."

The drone is taking advantage of several loopholes in order to legally enter Poland. It will depart from Germany, where abortion is legal. It does not need authorization from either country's government because it isn't being used for commercial purposes, it isn't flying through controlled airspace, and it's under a certain weight.

The tactic — which is intended to make more of a symbolic statement than a practical difference, since the small drone will only be carrying enough abortion-inducing medication for a couple of women — is certainly garnering a lot of attention. "Abortion drone is the best drone," one outlet declared. "It's a mission unlike any other," another noted. Right-wing sites, meanwhile, are sounding the alarm about the "dangerous abortion pills" that are about to be flown into Poland.

The two medications used to induce an abortion, mifepristone and misoprostol, are not actually dangerous. This form of non-surgical abortion, which can terminate a pregnancy in the first trimester, is the safest way to end a pregnancy and has been approved by the World Health Organization as an "essential medicine."

Gomperts has built her advocacy career on instructing women around the world about how they can take their reproductive health into their own hands with the help of these pills. In fact, Women on Waves gets its name from its first widely publicized campaign that also pushed the limits of international abortion policy: Gomperts built a clinic on a ship that was registered in the Netherlands, and, under the jurisdiction of Dutch law while in international waters, brought medication abortion to countries where it's illegal. She once appeared on Portuguese television to explain how women can safely induce an abortion with the right dosage of misoprostol alone — which is often stocked on pharmacy shelves because it's used for other medical purposes like treating postpartum hemorrhaging — in what marked the first time that anyone had so widely disseminated that information on TV.

To Gomperts and her colleagues, abortion pills represent a huge opportunity to give women the tools they need to secure their own reproductive freedom.

"You don't need to be dependent on other people. All of the women can do it themselves, if they have the medication and know how to use it," Gomperts told ThinkProgress in a previous interview. "I think that is what makes medical abortion so significant, and so revolutionary, and so important. You don't need a doctor to take some pills. That's the bottom line."

Around the world, countries have been gradually expanding women's access to abortion pills, as global health experts have reached broad consensus that this medication is an important method of reducing unwanted pregnancies and maternal mortality. The United States, however, has been moving in the

opposite direction. While abortion is technically legal here, an growing number of states are specifically targeting the pills used for the non-surgical procedure, passing increasingly restrictive laws that make them more difficult for patients to obtain.

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