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News / World

Abortion pills being delivered to Poland by drone

Dutch reproductive freedom activists to use drones to deliver medical abortions without having to step foot in the country.

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REMY DE LA MAUVINIÈRE / THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The abortion drug mifepristone, commonly known as RU-486, is shown.

By: **Robin Levinson King** Staff Reporter, Published on Thu Jun 25 2015

A group of Dutch reproductive freedom activists intend to deliver medical abortions to Poland by drone.

Rebecca Gomperts, a doctor and founder of [Women on Waves](#), says that drone technology could be the next step in reaching women in countries where abortions are illegal or restricted.

By using drones, Gomperts and her colleagues will be able to deliver medical abortions such as mifepristone, commonly known as RU-486, without having to step foot in the country, mitigating some of the legal risk.

“There’s nothing else that can do that,” she said.

Gomperts also singled out Canada [for not approving mifepristone](#), saying the prescription abortion pill could provide an option for women in areas without an abortion clinic. The drug [has been waiting for approval](#) by Health Canada since 2012, despite being available in 57 countries, including the United States.

“It could solve a huge problem of access to abortions,” she said. “It really changes the reality for women.”

Saturday will mark the first time Women on Waves tries using drones, delivering the pills directly to women from partner organizations within Poland, who will then distribute the pills to other women.

But this is not the first time the organization has used legal loopholes to bring non-surgical abortions to women in countries where the procedure is illegal. Women on Waves, founded in 1999, earned its name by performing medical abortions on boats in international waters.

Gomperts said while they could use the drone technology to deliver abortions elsewhere, for now, they’re just focusing on Poland.

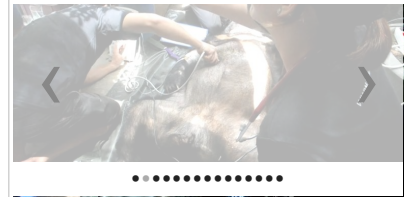
“This is the first time we’ll do it, and we want to focus on what’s happening here and



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how it's going to work," Gomperts said.

Poland is one of three countries in Europe where abortions are illegal, the others being Ireland and Malta.

In theory, women can get an abortion in Poland if their life or health is threatened. But in practice, Gomperts said, many doctors who work at Catholic hospitals refuse the procedure outright.

Some women travel abroad where it is legal, or pay a doctor to perform the abortions "after hours" for as much as \$3,000, she said.

"It's the women without money and the women without means who are bearing the consequences of these laws," she said.

According to the World Health Organization, some 43 million abortions happen every year, but almost half of those are unsafe, leading to as many as 68,000 deaths a year. The risk of unsafe abortions rises when abortion is illegal in the country, WHO found.

"Women are dying and they're suffering health consequences," Gomperts said. "The desperateness is enormous, when they have an unwanted pregnancy and they cannot get an abortion."

WHO recommends that women are examined by a clinic both before and after the procedure, in order to avoid complications. When Women on Waves assists with abortions by boat, they travel with a specialized abortion doctor, a gynaecologist, and a nurse to provide information and counselling.

But Gomperts said women in the drone campaign should feel safe taking the pill without direct medical supervision and will receive instructions on what to expect, and when to seek medical attention, from their partnering organizations.

If complications do arise, Women on Waves advises the women to tell their doctor that they miscarried.

Rachel Spitzer, an associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Toronto, says medical abortions are very safe.

Citing WHO data, Spitzer said that only about 0.05 per cent of women will experience complications that require hospital care. The most common complication is heavy bleeding.

Ideally, women are screened before they take the prescription pill, to make sure they are a good candidate. After six to nine weeks of gestation, Spitzer said, complications like bleeding or an incomplete abortion are more likely.

She also said there are additional risks to giving women the medication outside of the law, when they may or may not feel comfortable seeking medical care because they fear the consequences.

"Having working in many jurisdictions myself where abortion is illegal ... Often when they do come in with complications they're not honest, because they are fearful of retribution," Spitzer said.

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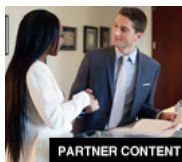
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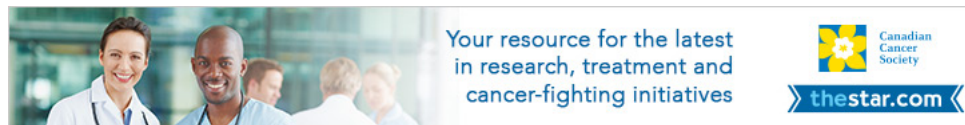
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