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## ABORTION PILLS IN IRELAND AS AN 'ACT OF SOLIDARITY'

THE DEBRIEF: NORTHERN IRELAND IS THE ONLY PART OF THE UNITED KINGDOM WHERE THE 1967 ABORTION ACT DOES NOT APPLY. THE UN HAVE RULED THAT THIS IS A BREACH OF WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS. NEXT WEEK, AS A SHOW OF SUPPORT CAMPAIGN GROUPS ARE GOING TO FLY ABORTION PILLS ACROSS THE COUNTRY USING A DRONE.

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According to the Department of Health, in the last five years alone, almost 25,000 pregnant women have travelled from Ireland to Britain in order to get an abortion (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/15/almost-25000-women-travelled-from-ireland-abortions-last-five-years%20>). Abortion has been legal in England, Scotland and Wales since 1967, when the Abortion Act came into force.

Northern Ireland, however, is the only part of the United Kingdom where the 1967 Act does not apply (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-35980195%20>). It's 2016 now and because of this, Irish women are forced to travel for the treatment they need. The maximum penalty for administering a drug to induce a miscarriage in Northern Ireland is life imprisonment. In the Republic of Ireland abortion is legal because of a law that was passed in 2013, but only under certain conditions such as a risk to the mother's health or medical complications. This law does not allow for abortion in cases of rape or incest, or when there is a foetal abnormality.

Just last week the United Nations (UN) human rights committee called on the Irish government to reform their restrictive and pernicious abortion legislation. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/21/irish-abortion-ban-un-human-rights-medical-reasons%20>) This was a landmark ruling in which the UN called on the country to introduce accessible procedures for pregnancy termination' to prevent women's human rights being violated.

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The particular case on which a panel of UN human rights experts cited was that of Amanda Mellet. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/09/ireland-abortion-laws-violated-human-rights-says-un%20>) Amanda took her case to the UN after she was refused an abortion in 2011. She asked them to formally denounce the ban on abortion in the country. They concluded that she was subjected to 'severe emotional and mental pain and suffering' when she was denied an abortion in Ireland despite the fact that doctors had discovered that the foetus she was carrying had congenital problems which meant it would die whilst in the womb or shortly after it was born. Amanda spoke out after travelling to England to get an abortion.

Earlier this year a 21-year-old Northern Irish woman was handed a suspended sentence for trying to give herself an abortion in Ireland because she could not afford the trip to England to get a legal, safe, medical abortion. Her housemates contacted police 8 days after she induced a miscarriage using drugs which she had bought online. (<http://www.thedebrief.co.uk/news/real-life/a-law-from-1861-means-a-british-woman-now-has-a-criminal-record-for-giving-herself-an-abortion-20160462881%20>)

Speaking to *The Debrief* earlier this year about the situation in Ireland Louise O'Neill, (<https://twitter.com/oneilllo?lang=en-gb>) a 31-year-old author from County Cork, said 'every time I hear a news story that is related to the eighth amendment - a young Indian woman dying of septicaemia because doctors couldn't abort her miscarrying baby, a clinically dead pregnant woman kept on life support despite the desperate pleas of her family, an asylum seeker who became pregnant as a result of rape being forced to undergo a Caesarean section at 24 weeks gestation because she was refused an abortion in Ireland - I feel a nauseating mixture of anger and fear.'

'I feel angry that I live in a country that pretends to be invested in equality and fairness and yet retains a draconian control over the female body. I feel furious that people proclaim themselves to be 'pro life' but who seem to care very little when the life at risk is that of the mother. The hypocrisy of it all infuriates me. Irish women have had and always will want and need to terminate unwanted or unviable pregnancies- 12 women a day leave these shores to avail if abortion services abroad - but this country wants to pretend that it's not happening, like it's our dirty little secret. I won't even begin to attempt to unpick the class issue inherent in all this, for the women who cannot afford to travel and who are stuck in a situation they are unable to cope with.'

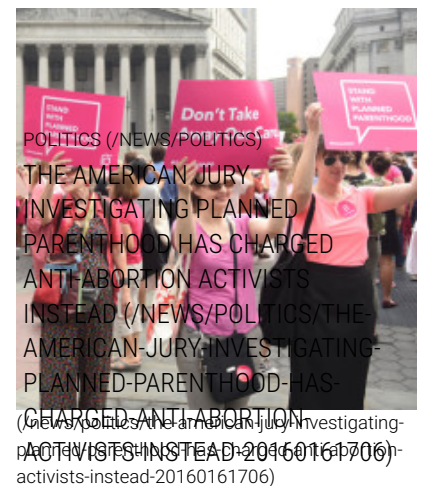
'And I'm afraid. I'm so afraid. I'm afraid that it could be me...I don't feel safe in this country, knowing that it doesn't seem to respect women, that it won't allow us autonomy over their own reproductive destinies.'

Following the UN's call for Ireland to 'amend its law on voluntary termination of pregnancy' pro-choice campaign groups Women on Waves and Alliance for Choice are planning to fly abortion pills into Northern Ireland with the help of a drone next Tuesday. This action will be a 'show of solidarity' with all women in Ireland who are affected by the country's draconian and outdated abortion legislation.

Women on Waves hope that the drone's flight will highlight the starkly different reality Irish women face compared to those in other European countries. The drone will carry abortion pills from Ireland to Northern Ireland to coincide with a hearing in Belfast's Court of Appeal about the UN's ruling that Irish abortion law is a breach of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Abortion pills are now used for most abortions in England and Wales, according to Department of Health figures.

([https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/433437/2014\\_Commentary\\_\\_5\\_.pdf%20](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/433437/2014_Commentary__5_.pdf%20)) For



the first time last year, more women terminated pregnancies by taking a pill than by having a surgical procedure.

Dr. Rebecca Gomperts of Women on Waves (<http://www.womenonwaves.org/>) told *The Debrief* 'research has shown that abortion pills are safe to use at home until 10 weeks of pregnancy and even if countries restrict access to abortion, women will obtain abortion pills by mail or by drone.' As far as she is concerned the service she provides only helps women with something which shouldn't be illegal in the first place.

You might also be interested in:

'Arrest Me Or Change This Law' Says Young Irish Woman Who Ordered Abortion Pills Online (<http://www.thedebrief.co.uk/news/real-life/arrest-me-or-change-this-law-says-young-woman-from-ireland-who-ordered-abortion-pills-online-20160160797>)

What It's Like To Be An Abortion Chaperone In Northern Ireland (<http://www.thedebrief.co.uk/news/real-life/abortion-in-northern-ireland-20150336375>)

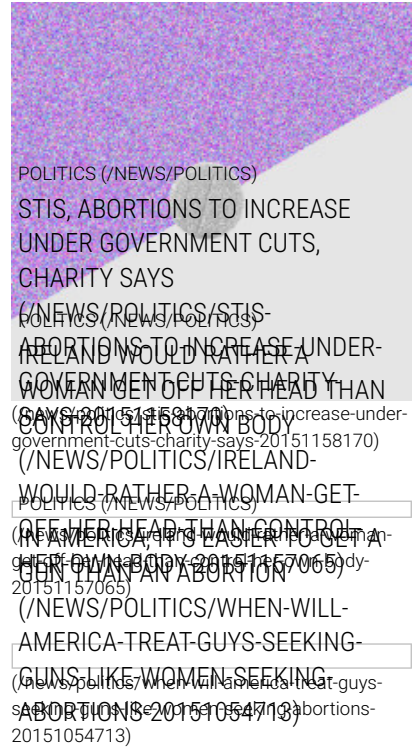
It's 2015 And British Women's Right To Safe Abortion Is Still Uncertain (<http://www.thedebrief.co.uk/news/real-life/its-2015-and-british-womens-right-to-safe-abortions-is-still-uncertain-20151156758>)

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