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# Troubled waters

**ABORTION** | Dutch pro-abortion group tries to lure Moroccan women offshore to receive abortion-inducing drugs



Associated Press/Photo by Paul Schemm

A yacht owned by Women on Waves in Morocco's port of Smir Thursday.

Moroccan officials closed the country's port on Thursday to protect its harbor from an unusual foe: A Dutch ship designed to serve as a floating abortion provider in international waters.

The showdown in Morocco's port of Smir began on Thursday morning when the pro-abortion, Netherlands-based group Women on Waves announced it would dock in the harbor.

Members of the organization—founded by abortionist Rebecca Gomperts in 1999—sail to countries where abortion is illegal to offer abortion-inducing drugs while floating in international waters outside the jurisdiction of local law enforcement.

So far, the group has conducted campaigns in Ireland, Poland, Portugal, and Spain. Workers distributed abortion drugs to more than a dozen women during the trips to Poland and Spain in 2003 and 2008.

The complicated process in both countries reveals how far the group is willing to go to distribute abortion-inducing drugs to even a handful of women: After advertising its approach and publishing a hotline, the group identified abortion-minded women up to six-and-a-half weeks pregnant.

When the ship arrived, the women boarded the vessel and cleared customs—a process that took hours. The craft then sailed 12 miles from the harbor to international waters—the distance group members say falls outside the jurisdiction of local authorities.

Once the ship reached international seas, a worker performed sonograms. An abortionist then distributed the abortion-inducing drugs to the women on board with instructions on how to use the pills.

According to the group's website, the workers dispenses pills (instead of performing surgical procedures) because Dutch law doesn't regulate abortions up to six-and-a-half weeks.

The campaigns aren't always successful: In 2001 in Ireland, the group never distributed drugs because of legal worries brewing in the Netherlands. (Dutch officials initially tried to block the group's work, but eventually reversed course.) Still, the group says it counseled nearly 300 women who called a hotline seeking abortion

advice. Workers offered information about obtaining abortions in neighboring England.

In 2004, authorities in Portugal blocked the abortion ship from entering its port. (The group's website celebrates Portugal legalizing abortion in 2004.)

This week marked the first time the group has attempted to distribute abortion drugs to citizens of a Muslim nation. Morocco has outlawed abortion unless the mother's life is endangered.

Moroccan officials sealed the port on Thursday when they learned the ship planned to approach its harbor. When they discovered the group had already sailed a yacht into the port, officials escorted the boat out of the marina.

The group's workers say they are undeterred, and that they would operate a hotline for Moroccan women seeking abortions. They said they would inform women that some abortion-inducing drugs are available for purchase in Morocco.

"The ship will stay near Morocco, and Women on Waves will now strategize their next move," read an online statement. The group pledged to provide "a lasting solution for women facing an unwanted pregnancy."

On shore, protesters in the Muslim nation gathered to oppose the ship's presence. (Pro-life groups have protested against campaigns in other countries as well.) Abdessamad Zihali, a protester in the Moroccan port told the Associated Press, "We are here because we cannot accept these values—the values of massacre."

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