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Drones to be used to smuggle abortion drugs into Ireland

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DUBLIN, Ireland - Gardai have warned any attempts to smuggle abortion drugs into Ireland by drone will be met with prosecutions.

Pro-choice group Women on Waves is planning a mission in the next few weeks, according to a report in Saturday's edition of The Independent.

The move follows a successful delivery of abortion drugs to two women in Poland last month. The pills were dropped in Poland by a drone which set off from Germany.

Drones, otherwise known as UAVs are unmanned aerial vehicles. They come in various sizes, the larger ones being extensively used for assassinations in countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen.

"The Abortion Drone left at 11.00 in front of the Konzerthalle Carl Phillip Emanuel Bach in Frankfurt an der Oder and landed at the opposite side of the river in Slubice, Poland," a statement on the Women on Waves website says. "There were no anti-abortion protesters. After the drones left, the German Police tried to intervene but the drone pilots were able to safely land the drones at the Polish side. Two Polish women swallowed the abortion pills that were delivered to them by the drones," the activist group's statement continued. "The German police confiscated the drone controllers and personal iPads. They pressed criminal charges but it is totally unclear on what grounds. The medicines were provided on prescription by a doctor and both Poland and Germany are part of Schengen."

Ireland's law enforcement agency gardai, and the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) have warned any delivery of drugs by drone would be considered illegal and would result in prosecutions..

A HPRA spokeswoman told the Irish Independent that the "mail order supply of prescription medicines is prohibited. This applies regardless of the nature of the medicine concerned."

She said the scenario mapped out by Women on Waves appeared to fall within the definition of supply by mail order as defined in the Prescription Regulations'

The HPRA, in co-operation with Revenue's Customs Service, the Garda and other international regulatory and law enforcement agencies, "actively monitors the supply of prescription and illicit medicines to Ireland" and can seize the product and make prosecutions, she told The Independent.

Dr Rebecca Gomperts, founder and director of Women on Waves told 'Newsweek' the legal implications of sending a drone to women in Ireland would need to be addressed as anyone who received and took the drugs could be prosecuted.

Cora Sherlock of the Pro-Life Campaign criticised the drone plan as a "cheap publicity stunt" telling The Independent it showed an "utter disregard for women's health."

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The Abortion drone campaign is a collaboration between Women on Waves; Ciocia Basia, Feminoteka Foundation, the 8 th of March women's rights informal collective "Porozumienie kobiet 8 marca", Berlin-Irish Pro Choice Solidarity, Codziennik Feministyczny, and the Political group Twój Ruch.

Drones have been in use in Northern Ireland since 2013, when they were bought in by the PSNI which now has nine of them. Some of them mirror mini-helicopters, such as the one pictured, while others have wings like large model airplanes.

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