

and unload the treatment room. The Dutch shipping inspector has contacted him and claims that since a medical facility has been welded on the deck, the ship's certificates are no longer valid. We insist that the A-Portable is a functional art work not an extra accommodation as the shipping inspector claims. The ship lingers near the coast of England. We call the Dutch shipping inspector, the ship's owner, our lawyer, the wharf and even the artist's studio to solve this problem. Once the construction drawings, stability calculations, welder's specifics and art-certificate are faxed, the shipping inspector reluctantly accepts our arguments. Until proven otherwise, the facility is a functional artwork.

Our voyage to Ireland continues. The sun shines and the sea is calm. We fold leaflets on deck as the dolphins guide our ship.

June 12, 2001 - Ireland, overwhelmed with calls

Preparations are in high gear as anticipation fills the air. The hotline number has been publicized in newspapers and on the radio. The public has heard that the ship will be arriving soon. The phone does not stop ringing. The press is anxious to get the details of the ship's arrival. Determined to disrupt our plans, anti-abortion activists make threats and crank calls.

Women seeking abortions start calling the hotline. We did not expect to get so many calls. The number of women calling and their anguished stories are overwhelming. Many are certain

that abortion is the right decision for them. They do not have the possibility to go to England. The hardship and expense present insurmountable barriers.

To obtain an abortion aboard the ship, the women risk being seen. Yet, they are not intimidated. We do not want women to delay their abortions or cancel appointments. Our ship can only provide abortion pills to women with early pregnancies. Therefore, we encourage all women to contact counseling centers in Ireland and go to their appointments if they have any. Many women plead with us to take their phone numbers and have the nurse call them as soon as the ship arrives.

June 12, 2001 - The Netherlands, threats of criminal liability

The main Dutch Christian party, CDA and other like-minded political parties begin a heated debate in lower house of Parliament. They insist that the government should have prevented the ship from sailing by impounding it and should still call the ship back. They even claim that we will perform unsafe abortions. Reacting to this mounting pressure the Dutch Minister of Justice, Benk Korthals, declares that our doctors can be imprisoned for up to 4 1/2 years if they perform abortions. He promises an investigation when the ship has returned. The Minister of Health, Els Borst, tries to calm down the heated discussion by saying that she has confidence in the professionalism and responsibility of the two doctors on board the ship.

June 13, 2001 - Aurora, passengers license The shipping agent in Dublin contacts the ship. He informs us that according to the Dublin Harbor Port Authority, the Aurora will need a special license to sail with passengers.

Our Irish partners and lawyers were unaware that such a license is needed. According to international marine regulations, every ship is automatically allowed to carry 12 passengers.

Having met all the safety requirements, the Aurora has a license to carry up to 50 passengers in the Netherlands.

The shipping agent feels that the Dublin Harbor Port Authority is carefully searching the regulations to find a way to stop our activities. While at sea, there is nothing we can do. Immediately after arrival in Dublin, we will have to solve this problem.

We still do not have a confirmed berthing place. We contact the harbor masters and finally get an approved berth. It was not the one we have hoped for but at least we have a place to dock.

June 13, 2001 - In Ireland, last preparations

Security procedures, workshops and the media strategy are finalized. Supporters and volunteers are kept informed of the moment of the ship's arrival. Most volunteers are working around the clock.

The three women from the Feminist Majority Foundation are extremely helpful. Joke and Lizet are in Dublin responding to

www.womenonwaves.org/net/com/nl

average of daily hits per month - december 2001, 801 hits - november 2001, 837 hits - october 2001, 1011 hits - september 2001, 928 hits - august 2001, 843 hits - july 2001, 851 hits - june 2001, 6567 hits - may 2001, 455 hits - april 2001, 4886 hits - march 2001, ? hits - february 2001, ? hits - january 2001, ? hits - december 2000, ? hits - november 2000, 384 hits - october 2000, 321 hits - september 2000, 263 hits - august 2000, 221 hits - july 2000, 334 hits - june 2000, 424 hits - may 2000, 186 hits - april 2000, 238 hits - march 2000, 159 hits

media requests. A last minute press conference with Women on Waves Ireland is held in a cafe.

June 14, 2001, 18.00 hrs - Arrival in Dublin Irish anti-abortion groups threaten to block our ship. To confuse possible lookouts from the anti-abortion movement, we approach Dublin harbor from the north side. In the early evening, we enter the Dublin harbor without incident and are guided by the harbor police.

When the Irish volunteers hear about the ship's arrival, they grab hastily made welcome signs and umbrellas and run toward the docks through a light Dublin rain. Since the berthing space has changed at the last minute, the volunteers and press rush to welcome the ship. They come by taxi, bicycle and run by along the riverside. They are thrilled to see the Aurora, Ireland's first ever abortion clinic and welcome the crew. The gangplank is lowered and the volunteers anxiously board the Aurora.

Marijke Alblas, an abortion doctor from the Netherlands, and several other Dutch supporters fly to Ireland to join the ship for a couple of days.

June 14, 2001, 21.00 hrs - Pressing concerns

Since the ship was at sea during the political debate on the license issue and ensuing media coverage, the crew only learns about this heated situation when the ship arrives in Dublin.

Therefore, we were unable to communicate the last minute developments around the license issue with the Irish groups. Immediately after our arrival we have a meeting with a small group from Women on Waves Ireland. By now, approximately 80 women have already requested abortion services. We do not have enough room and facilities to treat them all. Earlier we had purchased our medical supplies on the assumption that probably not many women would seek our services.

Furthermore it appears we can not sail into international waters with Irish women, as we do not have an Irish passengers license. After carefully reviewing the regulations, we are convinced that this passenger license does not apply to our ship and situation because we are not a commercial enterprise. To obtain the license usually takes 1 -2 days. In our case, it will take a month due to additional bureaucratic hurdles. In addition to a costly licensing fee there will probably be legal expenses as well.

Everybody is very disappointed. All these obstacles force us to abandon our plan to provide the abortion pill.

Our most pressing concern at the moment is to help the women requesting our services. Also we have to prepare statements for tomorrow's press conference. We try to create a coordinated press strategy. Together, we need to address why there will be no abortions on board the Aurora without losing our credibility. As complications occurred at both the

Dutch and Irish side, we agree that we must above all call attention to the pressing need for legal abortion services in Ireland.

June 15, 2001, 10.00 hrs - Press conference

More than 300 Irish and international journalists attend the press conference. The world has never paid so much attention. In our press statements we focus on the plight of Irish women seeking abortion services, how so many are forced to travel abroad and the desperation of women pregnant as a result of rape. We talk about the large number of women requesting our services and how due to unforeseen obstacles, we will not be able to provide abortions. We announce that we will do everything in our power to help all the women that contacted us in other ways.

During the press conference, a protester jumps on the roof of the treatment room. He is quickly removed by the security. There is also a demonstrator praying with a rosary in front of the ship. This event is staged by the press. On a nearby dock, a small group holds a prayer. The anti-abortion groups claim they don't want to generate publicity for our "publicity stunt" so they encouraged supporters to stay away. We don't know if this is true but the press readily quotes this and undermines our efforts. Despite our press conference, some of the media overemphasizes the fact that no abortions can be performed. Sadly, this oversimplifies and sensationalizes our project.



Arrival in Dublin - Arrivée à Dublin - Arrivada en
Dublin



Pikareske

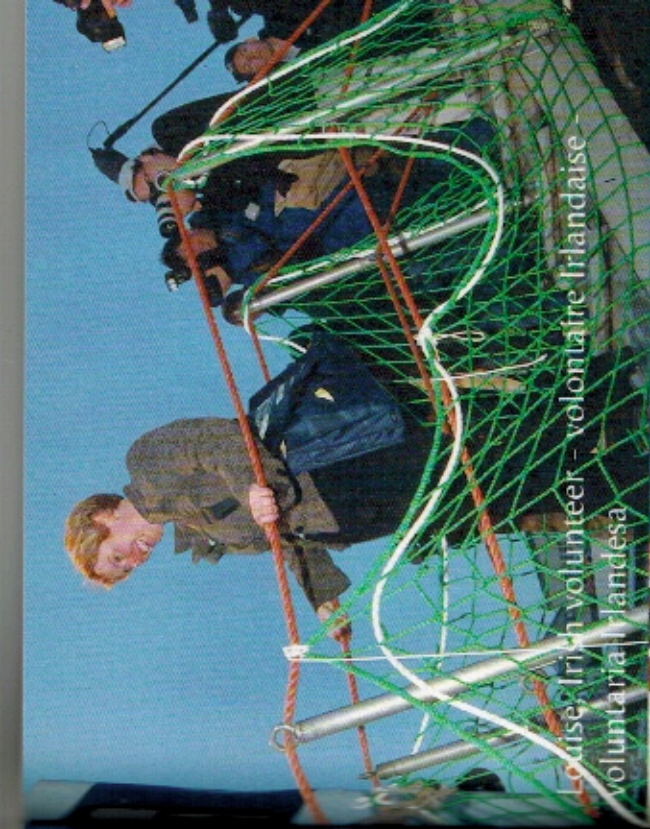
SCHEVENINGEN

G

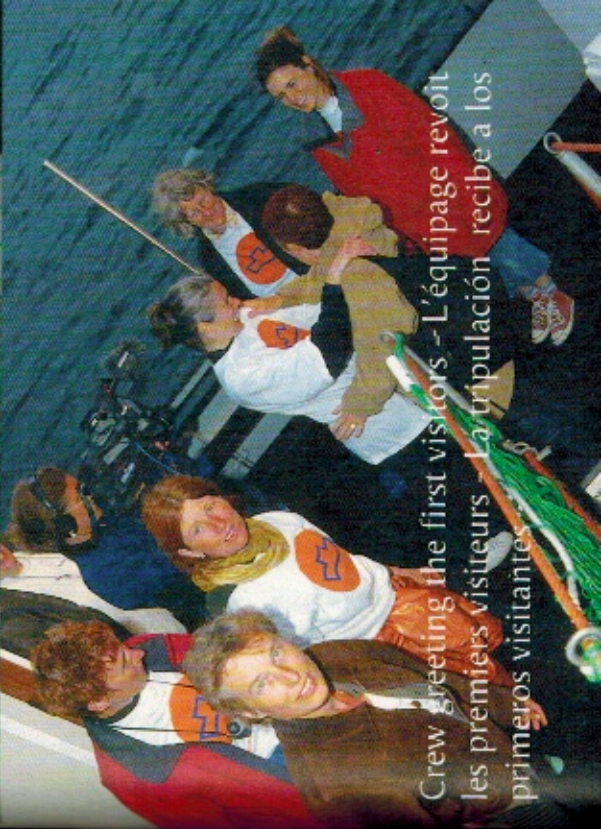
COOL
LOOKS



Margie, Feminist Priority Foundation



Louise, Irish volunteer - volontaire Irlandaise
voluntaria Irlandesa

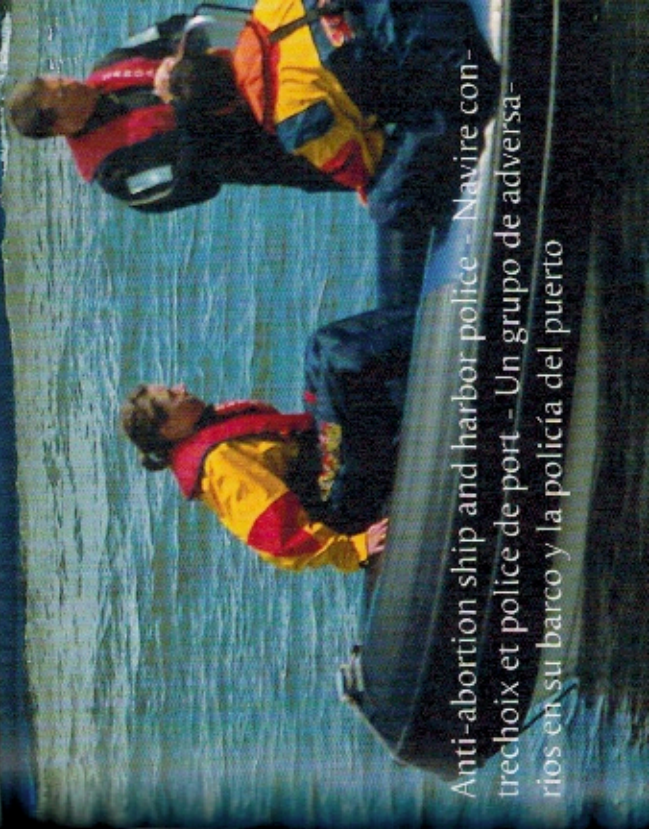


Crew greeting the first visitors - L'équipage reçoit
les premiers visiteurs - La tripulación recibe a los
primeros visitantes



Press conference - Conference de presse
La conferencia de prensa, Dublin

Lizet, Rebecca



Anti-abortion ship and harbor police - Navire contrechoix et police de port - Un grupo de adversarios en su barco y la policía del puerto



Lizet, Margie and Margreet reading threats by email - lisant des menaces par e-mail - leyendo las amenazas recibidas por correo



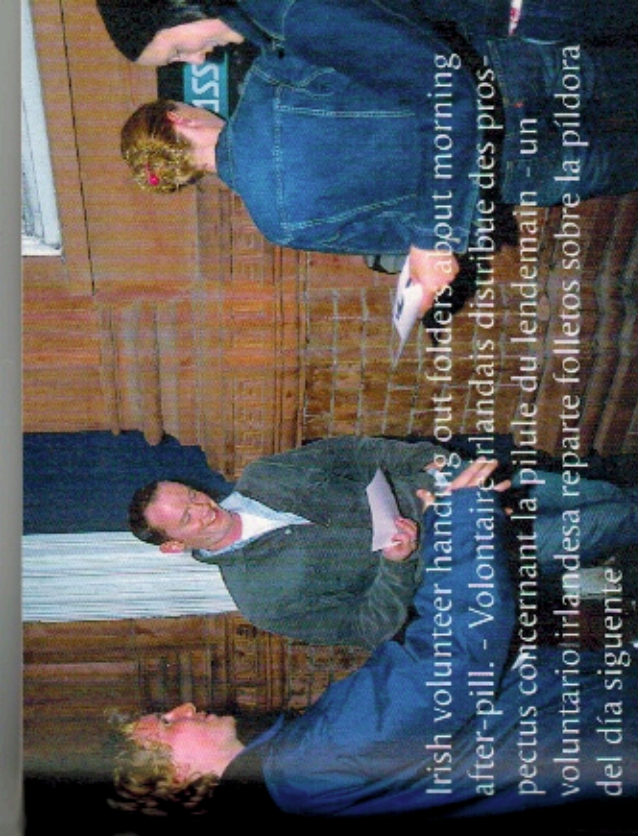
Juul, answering help-line - répondre à le téléphone d'aide - responder el telefono d'ayuda



Consultation with security, police and Women on Waves - Consultation entre garde, police et WoW - Consulta entre policía, guardia y WoW



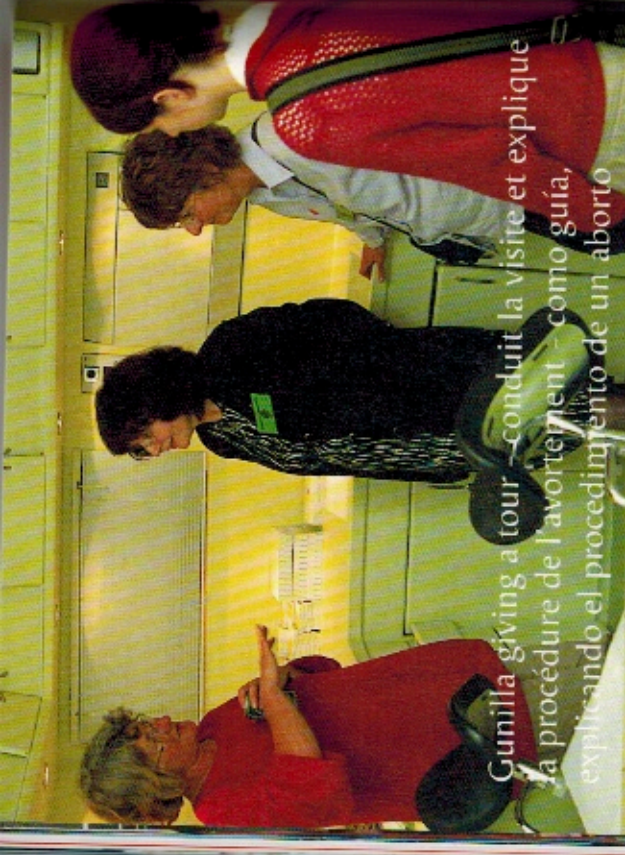
Workshops on board -
Talleres a bordo



Irish volunteer handing out folders about morning
after-pill. - Volontaire irlandais distribue des pros-
pectus concernant la pilule du lendemain - un
voluntario irlandesa reparte folletos sobre la píldora
del día siguiente



"No charge, no judgement" - "Pas de frais, pas de
jugement" - "Sin gastos, sin juicio"



Gunilla giving a tour - conduit la visite et explique la procédure de l'avortement - como guía, explicando el procedimiento de un aborto



Counseling - conseiller - Asesorar

The Aurora is front page news all over the world. BBC Worldnews, CNN, ABC, NBC and numerous other networks and news agencies cover this groundbreaking event. Positive press coverage appears in several Irish newspapers. One journalist even apologizes for her middle-class mentality as she had assumed in an earlier article that all Irish women could easily travel to England and that there would be no need for the ship.

June 15, 2001, 12.00 hrs After the press conference, our medical staff meets with representatives from several Irish counseling centers and English abortion clinics. Together, we need to determine the best ways to serve the women seeking abortion assistance. Their calls continue to flood the hotline. We contact clinics in the Netherlands, who agree to provide free services to these Irish women. We also contact a support organization for women seeking abortion services in England. We arrange for them to receive donations to assist the women who contacted the ship. These donations will cover travel and related costs.

Throughout the day, police boats patrol the waterside. The Feminist Majority Foundation reports suspicious events to the police, who send divers to check the underwater surroundings. We receive a number of threats, mostly bomb threats, by telephone and e-mail. The people working the swing bridge to the harbor also receive bomb threats.

Juul, the nurse: "I can still see myself on Friday afternoon seated in an uncomfortable position between the crates filled with oranges, in the cargo space of the ship, because there was no other place to talk freely and without disturbing sounds. I listened to heartbreaking stories, women talking in low voices because of shame, nervousness or restrained anger because they could not find help in their own country. Some were disappointed because we couldn't help them either. Some were desperate, others were just nervous. All of them were determined to have an abortion anyway. I gave them phone numbers of clinics in the UK and the Netherlands and airline companies with the cheapest tickets. The idea that even Irish pro-choice workers did not even dare to give this information was shocking. With some women I spoke several times, because they couldn't always talk freely or because they wanted more details.

Apart from the emotional stories of all these women, I was moved by the idea that I was working in another country where people put trust in me just because I was there on the phone to listen to them. Most of them kept talking about their situation, even after I had told them that we were not able to provide abortions. Some admitted that I was the first and only who knew. I told them they could always call again, just to talk, but also tried to motivate them to find someone they trusted nearby."

June 16, 2001 - Giving support over the hotline

Even after it is announced that we will not provide the abortion pill, phone calls keep coming in. Stories range from women that are raped, to a 15 year old girl that is kicked out of her house because she is pregnant. Her family physician said, "you have been stupid, bear the consequences, go home and have the kid." There are calls from single mothers without money, schoolgirls that can not find an excuse to be away for a few days and political refugees that do not have the papers to leave the country. They are all desperate.

Some women who call the hotline seek counseling. Many others have decided to abort and simply need accurate information about clinics abroad. By providing this information, we challenge the Irish law.

Despite the press presence, women start visiting the ship. All day long we counsel women with unwanted pregnancies, do pregnancy tests, make sonograms and distribute contraceptives.

June 16, 2001, 12.00 hrs - Writers workshop

Over 50 people attend the writers' workshop, which has been supported by well many known Irish writers. Several writers and poets read from their work. Information and expertise is exchanged. The ship becomes a place to reflect and debate the issues of choice.

Margreet, the captain: "During one of my watches I saw some people jump out of a car and run towards the ship. They sprinkled holy water over the container (treatment room) and said a prayer. Then they ran back."

June 16, 2001, 20.00 hrs - Legal workshop

During the workshop, panelists discuss the history of legal challenges around abortion, the laws in Ireland and in Northern Ireland and how EU law can be used to improve the situation.

The participants decide to start "Lawyers for Choice".

The workshop provides information addressing the abortion issue through legal means. The Dutch people discuss how their law was challenged decades ago. They emphasize that the time seems right for change in Ireland. Interights, a legal research institute from London had written a report on the legal issues concerning EU law and the ship's visit.

June 16, 2001, 23.00 hrs Irish volunteers distribute flyers in bars, restaurants and on the streets. The flyers mention that the ship hands out the morning after pill without charging or judging women. The crew members gather at the bar in the ship's hull and discuss the events of the day.

Riki, the deckhand: "I talked with people on shore in Ireland and I felt their need. It made me feel small and the

Direct action

Providing reproductive health services

Creating public awareness

Catalyzing legal change

On board a ship outside territorial waters, 12 miles from shore

High sea = Law of country ship's registration

Legal abortion in country of ship = Legal abortion at sea

Action directe

Dispenser des services de santé reproductive

Créer de la conscience publique

Provoquer les changements légaux

A bord d'un navire en dehors des eaux territoriales, 12 noeuds de la côte

Haute mer = La loi du pays de pavillon du navire

Avortement légal au pays du navire = Avortement légal en haute mer

Acción directa

Atender a los servicios para la salud reproductiva

Crear conciencia pública

Promocionar una reforma de la ley

A bordo de un barco fuera de las aguas jurisdiccionales, 12 millas fuera de la costa

El mar alto = La ley del país donde está registrado el barco

Aborto legal en el país del barco = Aborto legal al mar

Abortion illegal in all circumstances and to save the women's life - L'avortement est illégal en toutes circonstances et de sauver la vie de la femme - El aborto ilegal en todas las circunstancias y para salvar la vida de una mujer.

Abortion illegal except to save the women's physical health - L'avortement est illégal sinon de sauver la condition physique de la femme - El aborto ilegal excepto para salvar la salud física de una mujer.

The Americas and the Caribbean: Brazil, Colombia, Chile,

Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Suriname, Venezuela,

Argentina, Bolivia, Bahamas, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru,

Uruguay *Sub-Saharan Africa:* Angola, Benin, Central African

Rep., Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Dem. Rep. of Congo, Gabon,

Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali,

Mauritania, Mauritius, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia,

Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Burkina Faso, Burundi,

Cameroon, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Malawi, Mozambique,

Rwanda, Zimbabwe *Middle East/North Africa:* Afghanistan,

Brunei, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Oman, Sudan,

Syria, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco,

Qatar, Saudi Arabia *Asia and Pacific:* Bangladesh, Bhutan,

Indonesia, Laos, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Myanmar,

Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Djibouti,

Maldives, Pakistan, Rep. of Korea *Europe:* Andorra, Ireland,

Malta, Monaco, Lichtenstein, Poland, Portugal

problem so big. It was not just about 120 women. It is about all of us."

June 17, 2001 - Distributing the morning after pill

The ship is open for the public to demystify what an abortion clinic looks like and to provide health care services for women. All visitors have their bags searched and are scanned with a metal detector.

At least two volunteers guard the entrance of the ship at all times. Visitors are escorted while they tour the ship. Through all the publicity, most of the city knows the ship is in port and many women want a range of reproductive health services. All services are provided confidentially and free of charge. The medical staff distributes hundreds of packages of Norlevo also known as the morning after pill. Since Norlevo is not registered in Ireland, we once again challenge the Irish law.

All over Ireland people are talking about abortion - on the streets, in bars, restaurants and offices. Cab drivers dropping visitors at the ship refuse payment. Marie Banotti, Member of European Parliament also visits the ship and says that it might be about time that Ireland changes its laws.

A newspaper publishes an article by a tabloid journalist who had infiltrated a Women on Waves Ireland meeting prior to the ship's arrival. The article reveals the name of an Irish civil servant that has volunteered with our group and severely

damages this individual's career. Civil servants in Ireland are prohibited from participating in political activities.

Anna, the cook: "I was not really conscious of the huge emotional and psychological traumas women have when they become pregnant and they have to choose to have an abortion. Even more so, if they live in countries where abortion is illegal and considered a crime. Now, definitely I feel more close to those women, more sensitive towards this issue, more conscious. I'm very thankful for that."

June 18, 2001 - The ship is opened for visitors the entire day Actress Tyne Daly visits the ship. One visitor tells us the story of her sister's pregnancy. During the pregnancy she started bleeding and had a miscarriage. At the hospital she found out that she was still pregnant. It was a double pregnancy. The remaining fetus was diagnosed with congenital deformities. When she asked for an abortion, the doctors told her there was no reason for that. She was forced to go to England to be helped.

The hotline is still constantly busy. After a few days, we have received hundreds of calls. Women continue coming on board to obtain contraceptives and counseling.

June 18, 2001, 19.00 hrs - Trade union workshop Some trade union representatives meet with our crew

and Irish volunteers. Lesbian and gay union workers exchange their experiences in raising awareness. They discuss how their experiences can be used with the abortion issue.

June 18, 2001, 21.00 hrs - Some leisure time During the evening, volunteers relax with the crew as everyone socializes and enjoys the excellent dinner prepared by Anna and Riki. Some of us sit on the deck, some on the dock as we all enjoy the late sunset. We solve the problems of the day and strategize about how to improve the project to serve as many women as possible while in port. We also have time to speak with the press in greater depth.

June 19, 2001, 14.00 hrs - Artists Workshop Artists and art students attend this workshop. The mess room is packed. Irish artists give a presentation and address issues such as fertility, sexuality and human rights in the context of their work. The artworks are shown on videos and slides. A lively debate about how art can be used to add to society follows.

June 19, 2001, 20.00 hrs - Medical workshop About 20 medical workers are at this workshop. Unfortunately Gunilla is unable to attend in the beginning. She has returned this day to the Netherlands to receive a prestigious award from the Royal College of Scientists. Marijke, the other doctor

from the Netherlands, takes her place.

After a tour of the treatment room facilities, we show a video of a first trimester vacuum aspiration and distribute Manual Vacuum Aspirators to the doctors. We also give the doctors information on the use of Mifepistone and Misoprostol.

In addition to technical training, we share the desperate stories of women that called the hotline and urge the physicians to start providing abortions. Marijke discusses the importance of doctors uniting and providing abortions to challenge the law. She has performed abortions in the Netherlands before it was legalized. The meeting concludes with doctors and other medical professionals agreeing to start Doctors for Choice. It is the first time in Ireland that such a group is formed.

Most medical doctors in Ireland are very reluctant to speak in favor of abortion for fear of ruining their careers. Since the Women on Waves ship visit was announced, members of the Medical Council are calling for a less restrictive position against abortion.

Juliet, an Irish doctor: "Doctors for Choice is now up and running. We are small, but meaningful. The public mood has shifted a great deal in past months, mainly thanks to the Women on Waves project, it normalized everything. Women are now phoning up radio programs speaking about their abortion experiences, which was unheard of before! The press is generally pro-choice, in particular the Irish Times. The

Legalizing abortion can prevent unnecessary medical- and psychological suffering and death of women

La légalisation de l'avortement peut prévenir les douleurs médicales et psychologiques inutiles ainsi que la mort de femmes

Legalisar el aborto puede prevenir el sufrimiento médico y psíquico y el muerte de mujeres

Restrictive abortion laws violate women's human rights based on agreements made at numerous international conferences such as the UN International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo (1994) and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995)

Les lois anti-avortement violent les droits primaires de la femme basés sur les agréments faits à de nombreuses conférences internationales comme la Conférence Internationale des Nations Unies sur la Population et le Développement au Caire (1994) et la Quatrième Conférence Mondiale sur la Femme à Pékin (1995)

Las leyes restrictivas para el aborto violan los derechos humanos de las mujeres fundados en acuerdos conseguidos en numerosas conferencias internacionales Conferencias como la del NU, La Conferencia Internacional sobre la Población y el Desarrollo (el Cairo, 1994) y la Cuarta Conferencia Mundial sobre la Mujer (Beijing, 1995)

Labour party has openly declared itself to be pro-choice, the first in Irish History. *

June 20, 2001, 14.00 hrs - Community workers meeting The problems that prostitutes and drug addicts face with abortion are discussed at this workshop for community workers.

June 20, 2001, 16.00 hrs In two days we will be sailing to Cork. To assist with the last preparations, Rebecca along with representatives from the Dublin group and the Feminist Majority Foundation drive to Cork. No major problems occur.

June 20, 2001, 20.00 hrs We have a goodbye party for all volunteers on board the ship.

June 21, 2001, 14.00 hrs - Leaving Dublin The crew says goodbye to the Dublin volunteers then heads to the harbor and boards the ship. We leave the port. We relax on board after a hectic week. It is smooth sailing past the lighthouses and beautiful Irish coast.

June 21, 2001, 22.00 hrs - The longest day of the year The late sunset provides the perfect setting for our voyage.

June 22, 15.00 hrs - Arriving in Cork The harbor authorities in Cork urgently request that we delay the arrival of the Aurora for a few hours. They don't want us to disturb the Catholic procession with the remains of Saint Theresa in Cobh. We sail past Cobh harbor after the procession is over. An Irish Navy ship and police boats escort the Aurora.

A boat manned by anti-abortion groups occupies the berth reserved for the Aurora. The Harbor authorities order them to leave. The Aurora is welcomed by volunteers holding a big banner. Rebecca waits on the dock to tie the boat. She wears a bright bulky life vest fueling false rumors that the crew is wearing bulletproof vests.

As we expected, there are more protesters in Cork. A woman claiming to be a Portuguese nun shouts insults to us for several hours. A small anti-abortion group gathers near the berth to pray. A young bearded man hands out anti-abortion leaflets in front of the gangway.

Juul, the nurse: "Friday night in Cork a few crew members joined the Irish volunteers at a nearby pub where I started to spread leaflets and condoms. With just one exception, the response was very positive from both men and women. They were all very willing to talk about the backward situation in their country and that sex and everything related is such a hidden subject.

One woman told about her own abortion trip to England

some years ago. For a few young couples, I demonstrated how to use a condom properly on a beer bottle! It was fun. But it was also inspiring to see young people discussing their own stories and their strong opinions on freedom of choice."

June 23, 2001, 02.00 hrs Several men try to board the ship and are stopped by security. Later we find they are supporters, excited to see the ship after returning from the pubs.

June 23, 2001 - Security The arrival of the ship is announced in the local press. The ship is open to the public to obtain information, counseling, contraceptives and the morning-after pill. There is an art-exhibition on the docks. One artist invites children and passersby to participate in her artwork by making drawings.

The band that was scheduled to play on the dock is kept away by the security. Two of them are the men that had tried jumping on the ship the night before. The police presence in Cork is conspicuous. They stand very close to our ship and on two occasions interfere with our security.

One person is refused entrance to the ship by our security team because the police mention he has a criminal record. Later we realize that his crime was distributing leaflets with information on abortion services. We offer our sincerest apologies to him. Although he sends us a message that it was all right, he does not visit the ship anymore.

June 23, 2001, 11.00 hrs - Medical workshop

We realize just how difficult it is to reach medical professionals in Cork. Despite this, many nurses, midwives, crisis-pregnancy counselors and a few doctors attend the medical workshop. For some, it is the first time they learn about the existence of the abortion pill.

June 23, 2001, 15.00 hrs - Writers workshop

It is well attended. At least 60 people show up. People are even sitting on the stairs. Well known Cork writers and poets read from their works. After the readings everybody joins us for lunch. Riki and Anna work the whole afternoon feeding our guests as they have done before and will do again the next days.

June 23, 2001, 21.00 hrs A small film screening is held on board. We have several long feature films that deal with the abortion issue. We had planned to have screenings for visitors before but it is the first night that we actually have time.

June 23, 2001, 23.00 hrs Leaflets about the morning after pill are once again distributed. Meanwhile in Dublin, organizers lead a pro-choice rally through the city center.

June 24, 2001 Groups of teenagers, couples, women and even families visit the ship to obtain counseling, contraceptive and the morning after pill.

June 24, 2001, 11.00 hrs - Legal workshop We hold another legal discussion highlighting the uncertainty in the current Irish law. It becomes clear that there is a lack of objective information about abortion counseling services in Cork and elsewhere in rural Ireland.

June 24, 2001, 15.00 hrs The Cork Women's Political Association meets to discuss future strategies to legalize abortion and how to obtain an accessible non-directive counseling center in Cork.

June 25, 2001, 12.00 hrs - Departure We leave the harbor of Cork in the early afternoon and sail back to the Netherlands. The crew is exhausted. During the sea voyage, the project and new experiences are discussed extensively.

Juul, the nurse: "Most difficult for me was the emotional part of the stories, not being able to help these women. Three months later, I feel the same realizing that most of these women haven't found the means to get help."

Gunilla, the gynecologist: "It was hard to be confronted with the reality of Irish women who were unable to travel abroad to have an abortion, while knowing that I could help them with a simple pill. I was maybe even more shocked by the lack of understanding by some Irish medical doctors

and the Medical Council for the urgent problems these women face, not only in case of unwanted pregnancies, but also in case of congenital malformations. Women were so grateful for our listening ear, a non-judgemental attitude and real interest. This reinforces my feeling that good services are urgently needed. Women on Waves made this need clearly visible, which was one of the aims of the visit."

What did we achieve? The fact that so many women, mostly the young and poor, contacted the ship illustrates the pressing need for legal abortion services in Ireland. Women are even prepared to take the courageous step of going aboard the ship to obtain an abortion, defying press and protests. Unfortunately we could not offer these women the abortion pill due to the obstacles we faced. Still, we were able to provide support by referring many women to clinics abroad. In spite of the fact that we challenged the Irish abortion laws by doing this, no steps were taken against us. Hundreds of women visited the ship to obtain other reproductive health services. We distributed contraceptives and the morning after pill. We counseled women with unwanted pregnancies. Women were relieved that they could finally share their stories. They appreciated our respectful, non-judgmental approach.

Our workshops on board added to the exchange of information and stimulated the participation of different local professional groups and individuals. As a result, the size of the pro-choice movement in Ireland has increased enormously. New international and Irish pro-choice coalitions and networks have been built. Many Dutch and international organizations came forward to support the project.

Our trip has put the issue of illegal, unsafe abortion back on the international agenda.