

World – Abortion Rights Protesters Appear To Have Taken Abortions Pills In Front Of Police In Northern Ireland

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Protesters in Belfast have taken what they claim were abortion pills in front of police during a demonstration about Northern Ireland's strict abortion law.

Abortion is illegal in Northern Ireland in almost all circumstances, because the 1967 Act, which legalized abortion in the rest of the UK, was never extended there.

Protesters, who wish to remain anonymous for legal reasons, took the drug mifepristone, which is used in early medical abortion, outside Belfast Laganside Court on Thursday as part of a demonstration organised by abortion rights group ROSA (Reproductive Rights Against Oppression, Sexism and Austerity).

Taking abortion pills in Northern Ireland can carry a jail sentence of up to 14 years.

"Our main purpose is to prove that the law here is unworkable," Cerys Falbey, a ROSA activist, told BuzzFeed News.

The pills were delivered to protesters by a robot supplied by Women on Waves, a charitable organisation who along with Women on Web deliver abortion pills to women in countries where they are not available legally.

Since last year, women from [Northern Ireland have been able to access NHS abortion services in England](#) free of charge, although many are thought to order abortion pills online in order to avoid expensive travel costs, and so that they can carry out the procedure at home.

"Women in Northern Ireland are accessing abortion pills online every single day," Falbey continued.

"The whole point is to say that they cannot ignore us anymore and they cannot brush us under the carpet. Women are doing this."

Falbey said that police took the demonstrators away for questioning, as well as confiscating pills, but that no arrests were made.

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ast week's [landslide vote to relax equally strict abortion laws in the Republic of Ireland](#) to extend abortion rights to Northern Ireland have been renewed.



Minister [Theresa May, however, has said that abortion is a devolved matter](#) to be decided by Northern Ireland's legislative assembly, but the assembly has not sat at Stormont since the 2016 general election talks collapsed in January 2017, leaving Northern Ireland without a government.



When every day in Northern Ireland are using these pills – as long as we don't talk about them, as we act like it is a secret, politicians are not under pressure to legislate on this issue. Eleanor Crossey Malone [told Sky News's Darren McCaffrey](#), who was at the scene of the protest.



The abortion pill protest was one of a series of demonstrations by ROSA as they drove a pill bus around Northern Ireland on Thursday. Several activists were dressed as handmaids from the TV adaptation of Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel about reproduction, *The Handmaid's Tale*.



On Thursday, ROSA's branch in the Republic of Ireland [drove an abortion pill bus around the country](#) in support of calls for a referendum on relaxing Ireland's strict abortion law.



"Acts of civil disobedience supplied pregnant people with safe but illegal abortion pills, and these acts were also instrumental in shifting the debate on abortion," Socialist Party TD Ruth Smeeth said. "The actions of the group, who has campaigned alongside ROSA, and was in Belfast with the group on Thursday, were instrumental in their previous action."



Falbey said the group received a positive reaction from members of the public for their demonstrations on Thursday.

"Outside the court people were cheering us on," she said. "Regardless of how you personally feel about this, it's happening anyway, so stop criminalising women."

On Saturday, abortion rights campaigners will march in solidarity with LGBT campaigners in the annual March for Equality in Belfast. Same-sex marriage is also prohibited in Northern Ireland, being legal in the rest of the UK, and both groups are pushing for change on both issues.

"This is just the start of it," Falbey added. "We're not planning on backing down and this one off."

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