

Drone will fly abortion pills into Northern Ireland as 'act of solidarity'

Campaign group seeks to highlight strict laws on abortion in Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland

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Pro-choice campaigners are planning to fly abortion pills into Northern Ireland using a drone.

The unusual move, scheduled for next Tuesday, has been described as an act of solidarity between women on both sides of the Irish border to highlight the strict laws on terminations that exist in both countries.

Rita Harrold from Rosa, which is helping to coordinate the “abortion drone”, said: “The action is an act of solidarity from women in the south, where abortion is criminalised, with women in the north, where abortion is also criminalised and unfortunately there have recently been a number of prosecutions.

“We will be sending the drone over the border and bringing the pills into Northern Ireland to show women that they are still available and they are still safe.”

The flight will start at Omeath in Co Louth and land close to Narrow Water in Co Down.

A number of women, who are not pregnant, are expected to swallow the tablets - mifepristone and misoprostol - which can be taken up to nine weeks into a pregnancy and have been approved for use by the World Health Organisation since 2005.

“Obviously there have been prosecutions and the threat looms large, but the women who will be taking the pills won’t be pregnant at the time,” she said. “This is an act of protest against the eighth amendment in the south and the lack of abortion rights in the north.”

A number of pro-choice groups, Alliance For Choice, Rosa, Labour Alternative and Women on Waves, which staged a similar flight from Germany into Poland, have collaborated on the issue.

The groups say legislation permits the drone to fly abortion pills lawfully from one jurisdiction to the other.

They said in a statement: “The ‘abortion drone’ will mark the different reality for Irish women to access safe abortion services compared to women in other European countries where abortion is legal.”

The maximum penalty for the crime of administering a drug to induce miscarriage under the relevant law in Northern Ireland, the Offences Against The Person Act 1861, is life imprisonment. In the Irish Republic, the offence of procuring an abortion carries a potential 14-year jail term.

Anti-abortion campaigners have vowed to do all in their power to stop the drone.

Bernadette Smyth, from the Belfast-based group Precious Life, said: “I am currently seeking legal advice and may very well be in contact with the Police Service of Northern Ireland to ensure that these pills will be confiscated and to ensure that they are not used to destroy the lives of unborn children. These people are hell-bent on destroying lives, but we will be doing everything in our power, legally, to protect lives.”

Pro-choice campaigners also plan to take their protest to the gates of Belfast high court, where an appeal is to be heard next Tuesday against a ruling which found that Northern Ireland’s abortion laws breached human rights legislation.

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