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Dutch 'abortion boat' finally docks in Moroccan harbour

By *RNW Africa Desk*

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The Dutch 'abortion boat' has finally docked in the Moroccan harbour of Smir after having been prevented to do so by Moroccan authorities for several hours, say organisers Women on Waves.

On Thursday afternoon, the Dutch Health Ministry announced that the staff on board the boat could not carry out abortions in international waters because they had failed to apply for a permit. The ministry added that it had repeatedly informed Women on Waves that they did not have authorisation to terminate pregnancies in international waters off the coast of Morocco.

According to the ministry, Women on Waves must apply for a permit each time it sails. The Dutch Health Care Inspectorate, said the ministry, needs to check the quality and safety of the care and follow-up care. It reiterated that Dutch law applies in international waters because the boat is flying a Dutch flag.

The boat is sailing to Morocco at the invitation of the Alternative Movement for Individual Freedoms (MALI), which is campaigning for the legalisation of abortion in the North African country.

On Wednesday, the health ministry announced that the ship was not authorised to operate in Morocco and called on the relevant authorities to prevent the visit from taking place. However, Kleiverga insisted that the boat would not counsel or treat women in Morocco. "We're only going to provide treatment to women in international waters... Of course we (will) adhere to Moroccan law, and we're not going to offer abortions in Morocco," she added.

This is the first attempt Women on Waves has made to visit an Islamic country. In the past 11 years, its ship sailed to Ireland, Poland, Portugal and Spain.

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