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A ship backed by the Dutch pro-choice group Women on Waves has been blocked from entering the Moroccan port of Smir near the strait of Gibraltar.

The ship, dubbed an “abortion boat,” is being prevented from entering the harbor by Moroccan authorities, who said on Wednesday that, “The [health] ministry has not authorized any nonresident party or doctor in Morocco to carry out this medical intervention. The ministry calls on the relevant authorities to do what is necessary to ensure that the law is applied,” [Agence France Presse reported](#) [1].

Women on Waves is a [nonprofit](#) [2] founded in 1999 by Dutch physician Rebecca Gomperts to provide abortions to women in countries where abortions are illegal. The group charters ships to sit in international waters to provide “access to medical abortions, information, training, workshops, and safe and legal abortion services.”

"They have blocked the harbor. We can see a big warship in front of the harbour," Gunilla Kleiverga, a gynaecologist, told AFP by phone, and added “We are making an alternative plan,” but did not elaborate.

"We are only treating women in international waters. We're on a Dutch ship, where Dutch law applies. Of course we (will) adhere to Moroccan law, and we're not going to offer abortions in Morocco," she added.

Dr. Gomperts [confirmed to the BBC](#) [3] that they were planning to launch a “surprise” in response to the blockade.

The BBC reported that Morocco is the first Muslim country Women on Waves has attempted to visit. The group claimed it was invited by a local youth group called Alternative Movement for Individual Liberties. Women on Waves has previously provided abortions in Ireland, Poland, Portugal and Spain.

Abortions are illegal in Morocco, except when the life of the mother is in danger. Women on Waves estimates between 600 and 800 illegal abortions take place every year, killing an average of 78 women.

Protests broke out when the ship arrived, with demonstrators carrying pictures of bloody embryos and shouting “terrorist” and “assassin,” at Dr. Gomperts, [the AP reported](#) [4].

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Links:

[1] http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5h11S0lpV4RGrSicEaMzVbN_-zCrg?docId=CNG.cca28f368368b44c2aad1b72669e8f19.41

[2] <http://www.womenonwaves.org/en/page/650/who-are-we>

[3] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-19829889>

[4] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/04/dutch-abortion-ship-morocco_n_1939273.html