

Pro-choice lobby to fly in abortion pills by drone

By Deborah McAleese

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The 'abortion drone' will carry drugs across the border from the Republic next week where it will be met by activists who will then ingest the pill at the drop site

Pro-choice groups intend to deliver abortion pills by drone into Northern Ireland in an attempt to help women safely self-terminate their pregnancies.

The 'abortion drone' will carry drugs across the border from the Republic next week where it will be met by activists who will then ingest the pill at the drop site.

Further pills will be taken during a protest outside Belfast High Court. It will not be revealed which women, if any, are pregnant when they take the World Health Organisation-approved medication.

The highly controversial mission has been organised by pro-choice groups from Northern Ireland, the UK and the Netherlands to highlight the criminalisation of abortion in both Northern Ireland and the Republic.

Abortion legislation in Northern Ireland has come under intense scrutiny in recent months.

Under the Offences Against the Person Act 1861, anyone carrying out an abortion in Northern Ireland, except under some extremely limited circumstances, can be jailed for life.

In April a woman was handed a suspended sentence by a Belfast court after buying drugs online to bring about a miscarriage because she couldn't afford to travel to England for a termination.

The 21-year-old admitted procuring her own abortion and was given a three-month jail term suspended for two years.

Another woman is due to stand trial accused of unlawfully procuring a medical abortion medicine for her teenage daughter.

And last month, three women handed themselves in to police stating they had procured and taken illegal abortion pills and requested that they be prosecuted, in protest at Northern Ireland's restrictive abortion laws.

The pills are to be flown from Corna Mucklagh House in Omagh to Narrow Water at Warrenpoint on Tuesday morning.

A protest has been organised for later in the afternoon outside Belfast High Court where an appeal against a court ruling that Northern Ireland's abortion law breaches the European Convention on Human Rights is due to be heard.

Courtney Robinson of Labour Alternative said the mission has been organised in defiance of Northern Ireland's archaic abortion law.

"Every day we are seeing women being criminalised or being forced to travel to England. This is to highlight the criminalisation of women. The United Nations recently ruled that our abortion laws contravene human rights.

"The protest is also in defiance of the law. We are going to make the law unworkable," Ms Robinson added.

Another of the groups involved, Women on Waves, a non-profit group of doctors and activists from the Netherlands, said the abortion drone is "an all-island act of solidarity between women in the north and the south to highlight the violation of human rights caused by the existing laws that criminalise abortion in both the north and south of Ireland except in very limited circumstances".

The group added: "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."

Last year Women on Waves used the drone to transport pills from Germany to Poland where women can get a legal abortion only if there is proof of rape or incest, the mother's life is endangered or the foetus is severely malformed.

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