

---

Justice

## The Last Resort Women Are Turning to Because of Illegal Abortion

FEBRUARY 24TH 2017

By: Charles Davis

---

A pregnant woman in Guatemala generally has one legal option: give birth. In Guatemala abortion, as in much of Latin America, is illegal except when the authorities determine it necessary to save the mother's life. In practice that means only the rich, or those who can afford a flight to Miami, can exercise their right to choose in a manner that is safe.

Those who are poor — nearly half the country lives on \$1.50 a day — are forced to exercise their reproductive rights in a rather more dangerous way: in unlicensed clinics that, according to the Guttmacher Institute, send a third of the estimated 65,000 people who use them each year to the hospital with complications.

**Some women with a boat want to help change that.**



WOMEN ON WAVES - [WOMENONWAVES.ORG](http://WOMENONWAVES.ORG)

On Wednesday, the Netherlands-based group Women on Waves docked a ship at Puerto Quetzal, located on Guatemala's Pacific Coast. Their intention is to take women to international waters where they can legally receive abortion drugs.

On Thursday, the Guatemalan military effectively, but not officially, seized the boat, barring its four-person crew from leaving the harbor (and the ship itself). Speaking from the scene, Leticia Zenevich, a spokesperson for Women on Waves, told ATTN: that the government is fishing for a legal reason to detain them and deny their right to provide safe abortions, legally, in international waters.

**"We are here in solidarity with Guatemalan women who are having their right to abortion denied," Zenevich said, "and now we are going to fight in court."**

The last time Women on Waves tried something like this was in 2012, in Morocco; the boat didn't make it to port, though the group was successful when it tried the same thing in Spain four years earlier in 2008. This time the group decided to try the Americas, Zenevich explained, because "Central and Latin America in general have the most restrictive laws on abortion, worldwide."





WIKIMEDIA COMMONS/SUMAIA VILLELA/AGÊNCIA BRASIL - [WIKIMEDIA.ORG](https://www.wikimedia.org)

The Zika virus, which is believed to cause severe birth defects like microcephaly, spurred the idea. When the mosquito-borne virus began spreading across the Americas in 2015, and children began being born with abnormally small heads, it exposed the fact that the region's generally restrictive abortion laws had created two-tiered reproductive rights: the wealthy could fly away to terminate a pregnancy, and the the poor, legally, had to bring them to term.

In El Salvador, the government's advice was simply, don't get pregnant, at least until 2018.

**“The Zika crisis made it very clear once more that abortion is a matter of social justice,” Zenevich said. “Poor women are denied a spectrum of health services, including safe abortions.”**

Women on Waves has received hundreds of calls from Guatemalans looking to obtain abortion drugs on its unofficially seized boat, according to Zenevich. “It doesn't stop,” she said. “Women are calling every minute.”

For now, though, the boat sits, unable to provide abortion services nor, formally, seized. “It's very frustrating.”

SHARE YOUR OPINION

Is access to abortion services a matter of social justice?

Yes

No

Enter your email address to receive emails from ATTN:

[Empty email input field]

See Poll Results

Featured Image:AP/Alberto Saiz

FEBRUARY 24TH 2017

By: Charles Davis

@charliearchy



Subscribe

Your Email

GO

[About Us](#)

[Vote with ATTN:](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Jobs Worth Your ATTN:](#)

[Press](#)



Copyright © ATTN:, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[Terms of Use](#)

[Privacy](#)