

pregnancies.

The ongoing case is extremely rare in Northern Ireland, and led pro-choice group Alliance For Choice to release the open letter.



Women in Northern Ireland are severely restricted when it comes to abortion (Alamy)

Goretti Horgan, one of the signatories, explained: “It’s the first time, to our knowledge, that someone has actually gone past preliminary enquiry for assisting an abortion.

“It’s unfair because hundreds of women have been doing it for years.

“We thought the only way to get this message across was to tell the truth which is that hundreds and hundreds of women in Ireland have done exactly this. If it’s not for themselves, they do it for daughters, nieces, sisters and friends.”

- **The women risking 14 years in prison to get 'illegal DIY abortion pills' by post**

Abortion is legal in Northern Ireland, but only if a woman can prove her life is at risk.

Women are unable to have legal abortions if they are victims of rape or incest, given a diagnosis of foetal abnormality, or their health is at risk from pregnancy.

The restrictions mean that around 4,000 women are forced to leave the country to seek abortions elsewhere each year.



Sarah Ewart 24 from Belfast, was forced to go to England for an abortion in 2013 (PA)

Many more order 'illegal' pills online from websites such as Women on Web which provide World Health Organisation-approved abortion pills, such as Mifepristone and Misoprostol.

But in Northern Ireland, helping others take these pills carries the risk of a lengthy jail sentence, and the 1861 Offences Against the Persons Act carries a penalty of life imprisonment for women who have illegal abortions.

Horgan, who has helped women procure abortion pills by letting them use her credit card and address, said that the letter's signatories want to "join the woman in the dock" and will start handing themselves in to the police if no action is taken.

- **Abortion: How Northern Ireland could be forced to ditch its 'nightmare' law**
- **Ireland's abortion problem: new report lays bare the horrifying truth**

"We hope that some of us will be arrested, if not all of us," she said. "They should be prosecuting all of us."

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) said it was aware of the letter and was looking into it.

Detective Superintendent Andrea McMullan said: "Police are aware of the letter and are assessing its contents.

“Abortion is a very emotive issue and as police our role is to uphold the law. It would depend on the specific circumstances of an incident as to whether or not an offence has been committed and each case would be investigated on its own merit.

“Police would remind the public not to take prescription drugs that have not been prescribed to them. The taking of any prescription drug is potentially harmful if used without appropriate medical supervision.”



Amnesty International have labelled Northern Ireland's abortion law 'draconian' (Peter Probst/Alamy)

Alliance for Choice released a similar letter in 2013, in response to political discussions over abortion law, where more than 100 people admitted to procuring and using abortion pills.

But signatories said that none of them were ever visited by the police, or any other authority.

A recent Amnesty International report called Northern Ireland's abortion law “draconian” and found it to be the harshest in Europe.

Since 1970, around 60,000 women have travelled to England to seek abortion care.

Horgan, who campaigns for fairer abortion laws, said: “Women either find £1,000 to go to England for the procedure, or go on the internet and pay £70 for the exact same pill.

“They don't have a choice.”

Suzanne Lee, a 25-year-old from Belfast, previously spoke to Telegraph Wonder Women about illegally buying abortion pills when she was a 22-year-old student at University College Dublin.

She said the idea of being arrested for her abortion has crossed her mind, especially since she's spoken out publicly about it and now helps women in the Republic of Ireland buy abortion pills online, securing addresses in Northern Ireland where they can safely collect them.

"It's illegal for me to help," she said "It wouldn't be great to go to prison. But at the same time I'd rather have that hanging over me than wondering whether women are going to drink bleach, or throw themselves down the stairs.

"I don't think the Government has the guts to bring charges against me."