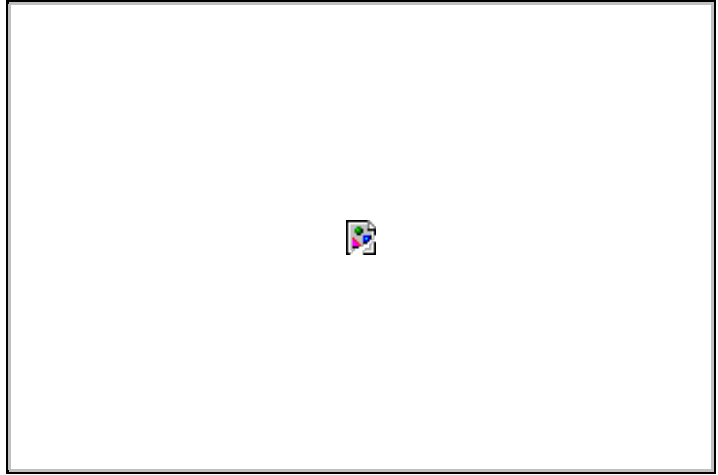

Moroccans voice opposition to Dutch 'abortion ship'



The Dutch non-profit organization Women on Waves, which is organizing the visit, says the ship will arrive at Smir, in northern Morocco on Thursday afternoon, around 40 kilometers ((25 miles) east of Tangier. (AFP

AFP, Rabat

Moroccans voiced opposition on Wednesday to the imminent arrival of a Dutch 'abortion boat,' on its first visit to a Muslim country to provide abortions to women that organizers say might otherwise be exposed to grave health risks. "Moroccan law forbids abortion. Moroccan religious identity says it is forbidden and so does Islam. So the government cannot allow this ship to come to Morocco," lawyer Abdelmalik Zaza was quoted as saying in al-Tajdid, the newspaper of ruling Islamist party the PJD. Chafik Chraibi, who heads a Moroccan NGO that seeks to perform abortions legally, also opposed the visit. "It's true that the initiative is symbolic, to defend the rights of women to have abortions," he told independent Moroccan daily Le Soir. "But to practice abortion at sea, in international waters, is for me a way of circumventing the law and is something clandestine," he added. The Dutch non-profit organization Women on Waves, which is organizing the visit, says the ship will arrive at Smir, in northern Morocco on Thursday afternoon, around 40 kilometers (25 miles) east of Tangier. Many in Morocco expect it to be turned away. The Dutch group says the purpose of the visit is to provide

women with 'safe legal medical abortions' up to 6.5 weeks into pregnancy, in a country where the practice is illegal and taboo and can expose women to grave health risks. It also said it will set up a hotline to inform women about safe medical abortions that can be induced at home. Doctor Rebecca Gomperts, the founder of Women on Waves, told AFP that around 600 to 800 Moroccan women have an abortion every day. "The problem is that only about 200 cases are done properly, by women who have money," Gomperts said, with the rest resorting to dangerous methods because they are unable to afford the expensive treatment. This leads to the deaths of 78 Moroccan women each year on average, Gomperts claimed, citing statistics provided by the World Health Organization. But Moroccan pro-life groups deny those figures, and dispute the motives of the local youth group the Alternative Movement for Individual Liberties (MALI) that is helping to organize the visit. "The figures on abortion are not right," said Hannan Idrissi, a member of a Moroccan pro-life group, was quoted as saying by al-Tajdid. "The MALI movement that invited the ship is known for its disrespect for ethics and the dignity of Moroccan society," she added

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