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GLOBAL HEALTH  
**Guatemala not the first country to resist the 'abortion boat'**

BY LISA NIKOLAU ON 27 FEBRUARY 2017

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Women on Waves's crew on board a boat detained last week outside of Guatemala. (Women on Waves Facebook page)

Guatemala is the latest of a handful of countries to resist [Women on Waves](#), a Dutch nonprofit that provides medical abortions to women in countries where the procedure is banned.

The Central American country on Thursday [ordered the expulsion](#) of the group's so-called abortion boat after it docked in San Jose last Wednesday.

The organization docks in international waters in order to legally provide women with medical abortion pills (Mifepristone with Misoprostol), which are approved by the World Health Organization and [proved to be effective](#) and safe for early first trimester abortions. They also offer free sexual health and contraceptive advice.

The group said it was [appealing the decision in court](#), arguing that it had all the necessary papers and permits to be there.

"Guatemalan women have the human right to a safe abortion and to an informed, fact-based national dialogue and this is what this action is about," Women on Waves said in a [statement](#) yesterday. "We're very sorry we still could not help any of the hundreds of women who have

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called us in the last 48 hours but we will keep fighting, both to liberate our crew, who are bravely standing all sorts of human rights violations, and to stand for the human rights of Guatemalan women.”

On Thursday, Women on Waves [said](#) that access to safe abortion is fundamentally a social justice issue, “especially at the dawn of the Zika crisis.”

Abortion is illegal in Guatemala except when the mother’s life is in danger. Still, some [65,000 illegal abortions](#) take place in the country each year. The country has one of the highest birthrates and some of the youngest mothers in the world, with close to a [quarter](#) of all births in Guatemala by teenage mothers.

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This is the organization’s first visit to the Americas. Women on Waves began campaigns in 2002 to call attention to the consequences of illegal abortion, after receiving permission from the Dutch Health Minister Els Borst. So far, the group has completed visits to Poland, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Morocco.

All of the campaigns have been met with resistance. One of the most controversial visits took place in 2004, when the organization’s attempt to enter Portuguese waters was blocked by two Navy warships. At the time, Portugal was the only EU country to actively prosecute women and doctors for performing illegal abortions.

“I’m so ashamed that my government is not allowing [WoW] to enter Portuguese territorial waters, not only because it is in complete conflict with European regulations, but also because it is a complete misrepresentation of the Portuguese public opinion,” [said](#) one Portuguese reporter identified as “Ana” on WoW’s website.

Less than three years later, Portugal legalized first trimester abortion, and the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the country’s actions to bar the WoW ship [violated the group’s freedom of expression](#).

Outside of its visits to individual countries, Women on Waves supplies medical abortion pills to women by individual request, and carries out campaigns remotely by distributing the information online or through telephone hotlines. After providing training and technical support through partner organizations, Women on Waves launched such hotlines in Ecuador (June 2008), which permits abortion in case of rape or threat to the mother’s life, and in Chile (June 2009), which criminalizes abortion in all circumstances.

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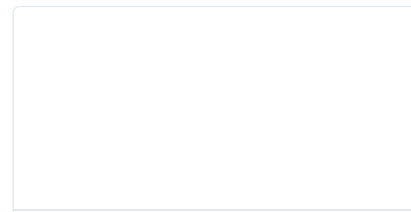
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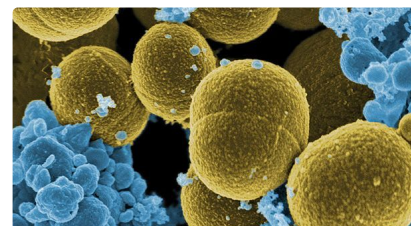


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