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Northern Irish woman appears in court accused of breaking abortion ban

Unlike the rest of the UK, it is a criminal offence in Northern Ireland to have an abortion or to help someone else to have one

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Laganside Courts *Google maps*

A woman has appeared in court in Northern Ireland charged with breaking the region's abortion ban.

The woman, who cannot be named for legal reasons is accused of helping her daughter have an abortion. She faces a possible sentence of up to life in prison under Northern Ireland's abortion ban. The woman is accused of "supplying poison with the intent of procuring a miscarriage."

A spokesperson for the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service told The Independent that the case has been adjourned until May 18.

Last month, a 21-year-old woman was given a suspended prison sentence after pleading guilty to having an abortion in Belfast. The woman told the court that she was 19 when she had an

unplanned pregnancy and could not afford to travel to England for the procedure. She ordered pills online and performed an abortion on herself at her home in Belfast.

Amnesty International Northern Ireland Programme Director Patrick Corrigan attended Belfast Crown Court for the arraignment today. He said: “The criminalisation of women in Northern Ireland is becoming a grim trend, with this second court case in a matter of weeks.

“How many more women are we to see hauled into the dock before these archaic laws are consigned to the history books where they belong? Reproductive healthcare must be taken out of the realm of criminal justice and addressed as an issue of public health and human rights. Abortion is a matter for women and their doctors, not police and judges.”

Emma Campbell, Vice-Chair of local campaign group ‘Alliance for Choice’ told The Independent: “Alliance for Choice are dismayed that another woman faced court today for accessing basic, safe healthcare for her child in Northern Ireland. This is an indictment on the State party with responsibility for our human rights which is Westminster. We firmly believe that women should be trusted to know what is best for themselves and their families.”

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Unlike the rest of the UK, it is a criminal offence to have an abortion or help someone else to do so in Northern Ireland where the 1967 Abortion Act does not apply. In November, Belfast High Court ruled that the ban is a breach of international human rights law. However, in February Stormont voted to keep the ban regardless.

Last week Shadow Justice Minister Jo Stevens wrote to Westminster's human rights committee demanding urgent action to overturn the ban. The letter, co-signed by a number of Labour MPs, said: "These prosecutions are continuing despite a ruling of the high court that Northern Ireland's abortion laws are incompatible with the UK's Human Rights Act... We appreciate that abortion is a devolved issue. However, human rights are not a devolved issue."

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