

ISSUES


A Dutch Women's Org Is Sending an "Abortion Drone" to Poland to Raise Awareness About Reproductive Justice

Women on Waves is sending an "abortion drone" filled with pills to perform medical abortions to Slubice, Poland, where abortion is almost impossible to legally access.

S.E. SMITH · JUN 26, 2015

The award for "Best Use of a Drone 2015" goes to the Dutch organization Women on Waves, which
Slubice, Poland.
instructions to
Polish citizens who can't legally access abortions except under extremely restrictive circumstances.
So, basically, Women on Waves just won bragging rights for the most creative provision of abortion services, and it's making a very public comment about reproductive justice in Poland.

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11
12

Most EU nations have extremely sensible policies on abortion. Namely, people who want them can receive them. A handful of Roman Catholic nations — like Poland — think otherwise, restricting abortion to limited circumstances. In the case of Poland, people can only get abortions if a pregnancy is a serious threat to the health of the pregnant person, or if it's the result of rape or incest. Groups like Woman on Waves, along with every rational person who thinks that people should be able to make their own medical decisions, are aiming to change that.

Founded in 1999, Women on Waves is basically the coolest radical feminist organization ever. They travel the globe providing abortion education — and abortions — to people who can't access them in their home nations. Famously, the organization maintains a boat that sails the high seas to provide medical abortions. The boat anchors in international waters just off the shores of regions like Northern Ireland, where abortion isn't legal, so patients can make the trek to the ship's mobile abortion clinic and terminate unwanted pregnancies.

It was started by physician Rebecca Gromperts, who trained to provide abortions and initially worked with Greenpeace before founding Women on Waves in response to the terrible cases of patients in need of abortions that she encountered during her travels. The ship travels with a crew of licensed medical staff who provide safe, compassionate abortion services to those in need. The organization also provides a mail order abortion pill service along with ongoing education on how to safely perform medical abortions.

With the abortion drone, Women on Waves is hitting the 21st century with panache and making a dramatic political statement. The drone will be loaded up in Frankfurt an der Oder, taking advantage of the fact that abortion is legal in Germany, before zipping across the border to Poland — and the organization doesn't need to file a flight plan, thereby dodging potential legal wrangling. Consider it the Berlin Airlift of abortion services, providing people with critical medical care while also making a dramatic political statement.

Right wingers, of course, are having a conniption, making dire prophecies about the end of society and threatening the Polish people with "dangerous abortion pills." Some have even threatened to shoot the drone down, but thanks to the EU's progressive gun laws — the U.S. should take a memo — that's a threat most won't be able to make good on, as the number of gun owners in the EU is extremely low.

It's also a great example of how drones can be used for the power of good, not just evil. The organization modeled the idea off package delivery services being explored by retailers in the U.S., which demonstrate that running a drone delivery service can be highly efficient and cost effective. In the case of Polish people, it can also be empowering and lifesaving, providing those with unwanted pregnancies with the option of terminating them and moving forward with their lives.

The organization says that if this round is successful, they may expand the program. In this particular instance, the abortion drone, planned to launch tomorrow, is more of a publicity stunt — it's carrying a very limited number of pills and can't serve very many people. However, as a comment and a test case, it has a great deal of potential, and it's this that Women on Waves is interested in. The ability to send drones into the borders of nations with conservative abortion laws would provide yet another opportunity for getting vitally needed medical care into the hands of people who need it.

Women on Waves is famous for its direct action to put abortion and bodily autonomy on the front lines, but also for its political activism. Poland, and other EU nations that don't believe in full human rights, need to change their policies on abortion and reproductive health. If they don't, Polish people seeking terminations will continue going to back alley butchers, risking serious infections and other complications from illegal abortions. As many as a quarter of a million people seek illegal abortions in Poland annually, according to Women on Waves, in part because of poor sexual education and limited access to contraceptives, and the cost can be as much as \$4,500 USD.

This is an untenable and dangerous situation, especially when one considers the fact that some people eligible under the current laws *still* can't access abortion care thanks to the hoops they need to jump through. Polish people, and those living in other nations with restrictive abortion laws, deserve better than this — it's absurd to think that they have to rely on a drone to get what should be readily available in a doctor's office.

Banning abortion doesn't mean it stops happening — it just makes it more dangerous. The abortion drone is going to change that for at least a few Polish people in the short term, and if it's successful, it could become a regular delivery service.

Personally, I think expanding access to medical abortion is a way cooler use of a drone than same-day electronics delivery, and it's not the only example of "drone aid," with drones being used for public service like [tracking poachers](#) and helping with [Nepal's earthquake recovery](#). Here's hoping that someday soon, the abortion drone will be a novelty story and nothing more, with people around the world having access to safe abortion on demand.