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Campaigners to fly drone with abortion pills across Irish border

BY UMBERTO BACCHI

LONDON (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - Pro-choice groups plan to fly a drone carrying abortion pills from Ireland to Northern Ireland in protest against restrictions on terminations on both sides of the border, activists said on Thursday.

Organizers said the move was intended as a show of solidarity between women facing some of the strictest abortion laws in Europe.

In Ireland and Northern Ireland, abortion is permitted if the mother's life is in danger. In Northern Ireland, it is also allowed if there is a permanent or serious risk to a woman's mental or physical health.

But in the rest of Britain, abortion is legal up to 24 weeks into pregnancy and can be carried out at a later stage if the mother's life is at risk or if there are indications the baby will suffer a serious disability.

"The abortion drone will mark the different reality for Irish women to access safe abortion services compared to women in other European countries where abortion is legal," pro-choice groups behind the protest said in a statement.

The drone drop, planned for next Tuesday, comes two months after a court in Belfast, Northern Ireland, handed a suspended prison sentence to a woman who bought abortion drugs online.

Campaigners have long called for a relaxing of the abortion laws in Northern Ireland, where the maximum penalty for inducing an abortion is life imprisonment.

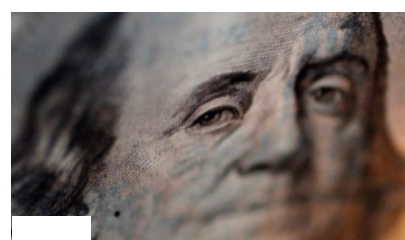
In Ireland, a traditionally Catholic country, a complete ban on terminating a pregnancy was lifted in 2013 after large street protests from both sides.

In June a U.N. panel ruled that Ireland's regulations subjected women to discriminatory, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment after a woman complained she was denied treatment and forced to choose between carrying her baby with a fatal congenital defect to term and going abroad for an abortion.

Campaigners said the drone, scheduled to fly over the Newry River, will drop abortion pills which a number of non-pregnant women are expected to take. Organizers said consuming abortion pills was legal unless they were taken for the purposes of a termination.

"The purpose of taking the pills is to show they are safe because in the North (Northern Ireland) there is a lot of scaremongering around the issue," said Courtney Robinson, a spokeswoman for Labour Alternative, one of the four pro-choice groups involved in the protest.

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The protest is the second of its kind as Women on Waves delivered abortion pills from Germany to Poland in June last year.

(Reporting by Umberto Bacchi @UmbertoBacchi, Editing by Katie Nguyen. Please credit the Thomson Reuters Foundation, the charitable arm of Thomson Reuters, that covers humanitarian news, women's rights, trafficking, property rights and climate change. Visit news.trust.org)

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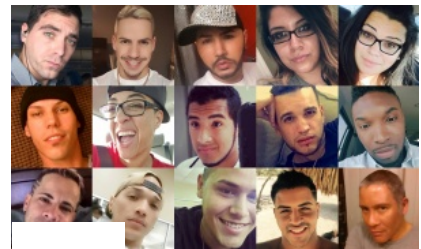
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