

Champions of choice

By Mayuri Phadnis, Pune Mirror | Jun 28, 2015, 02:30 AM IST



(Top) The Women on Waves boat, which helps women in anti-abortion countries. (Below left) The abortion drone flew outside controlled airspace to drop medicines for Polish women in Slubice in Poland

Dr Rebecca Gomperts of Women on Waves continues to step up her efforts to ensure safe pregnancy termination for women in anti-abortion countries, aided by her Nagpur colleague

The death of Savita Halappanavar in a hospital in Ireland, two years ago, had led to nationwide protests that spilled over to India as well. The 31-year-old dentist was suffering from a miscarriage, caused reportedly by bacterial infection. But the country's laws did not allow an abortion, and she was told that the child had a heartbeat and her condition was not life-threatening.

Anti-abortion laws, which in many cases prove detrimental to the health of pregnant women, exist also in countries like Netherlands, Poland and Malta. It is with the aim of helping women from such countries that Dutch physician Dr Rebecca Gomperts, from Germany, launched Women on Waves (WoW) in 2002. The group brings women in need aboard its boat and heads for international

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waters, before giving them mifepristone and misoprostol — pills used to induce safe pregnancy termination. The women are then sent back home for the medication to take effect. Helping WoW in its operations is Mohan Kale, a Nagpur-based medicine supplier.

On Saturday, WoW took its mission a step further when its 'abortion drone', carrying World Health Organisation approved medicines, took off from in front of the Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach concert hall in Frankfurt (Oder) for Slubice, Poland. Although German police tried to intervene, the drone pilots were able to safely land the drones on to the Polish side, where two Polish women, reportedly, even took the medication. The German police has pressed criminal charges on the organisation, although it is unclear on what grounds. According to Wow, the abortion drone did not require authorisation from the Polish or German government as its route was not through controlled airspace, it wasn't for commercial purposes, and it weighed less than 5kg.

Back in 2006, WoW evolved into Women on Web, a website thorough which women are supplied the pills after an online consultation. The women are required to do a pregnancy test and, if possible, an ultrasound before interacting with any of the organisation's doctors via an online questionnaire, which asks for estimated time of conception and delves into patients' history to rule out any complications. It is after a doctor approves the request that prescriptions for the required medicines are sent to Kale, who has been working with Gomperts since 2012. "The pills are supplied on a no-loss-no-profit basis from here," informs Kale, who believes that "no one but the woman herself has a right over her body."

According to Gomperts, the abortion drone was also a means to visualise the different realities of access to abortion in different European countries and the ongoing violation of women's rights even in Europe. "Women on Waves is most known for its ship campaigns to countries where abortion is illegal.

Over the years, we have used innovative strategies with ships, mobile phones, apps, printed material, grassroots mobilisation, Internet and art to draw much-needed public attention to reproductive health services and to create access to contraceptives and safe medical abortion," she says.

But, as one would expect, it hasn't been smooth sailing. Kale shares how the organisation is inundated with hate messages from men, who are against abortion. "But who are they to say anything? They have no experience of motherhood. It is not they who carry the baby. The laws have been made by men and women are like captives in their world," says the businessman, who claims to ship out at least 70 consignments for WoW a day.

Gomperts also acknowledges the challenges, but asserts that challenges and setbacks "are also new opportunities". So what keeps her going in the face of such obstacles? "The need of women," she says.

The women, in turn, are more than grateful. For every hate mail, there is one letter of gratitude. Keeping their identities undisclosed, women from across the world have come forward to thank WoW. While one beneficiary from Poland writes: "You have helped me in a very complicated moment of in my life, which I am still getting over. I want to let you know the process happened without any complication and I did not need to see the doctor. Thank you, you were my angels from earth", a Pakistani woman said: "We are living in a country where women do not have basic rights. I got scared when I got pregnant. God bless you." A woman from Northern Ireland also expressed her feelings, saying: "Without you, I would not be where I am now, studying. I am very thankful, you saved me."

That is recognition enough of the kind of impact Dr Rebecca Gomperts and WoW has created with their work.

■ **According to Gomperts, the abortion drone was also a means to visualise the ongoing violation of women's rights in Europe**

GALLERIES

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Katrina Kaif

Kangana Ranaut

Jimmy Shergill

Taylor Swift

Sara Sampaio

Emma Stone

Nargis Fakhri

Anushka Sharma

Kangana Ranaut

Richa Chadha

Parineeti Chopra

Jennifer Aniston Paris Hilton Rihanna Alia Bhatt

Christina Aguilera Salma Hayek Kate Winslet Penelope Cruz

Andy Murray Novak Djokovic Lionel Messi Steven Gerrard

Nargis Fakhri Amyra Dastur Shefali Shah Meenakshi Dixit

Jennifer Aniston Priyanka Chopra Taylor Swift Alia Bhatt

Amal Clooney Golshifteh Farahani Eva Mendes Kylie Minogue

Atif Aslam Emma Stone and Andrew Garfield Radhika Apte Salma Hayek and Matthias Scho...

Lara-Dutta

Jessica Alba

Beyonce

Iggy Azalea

Kristen Stewart

Nandita Das

Cate Blanchett

Sonam Kapoor

Du-Plessis

Virat Kohli

Rohit Sharma

David Warner

Steven Gerrard

Yevhen Seleznyov

Rafa Nadal

Shakib-Al-Hasan

Jennifer Lopez

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Sofia Vergara

Cate Blanchett

Bombay Velvet

Sunny Leone and Ram
Kapoor

Bipasha Basu

Miranda Kerr and
Selena Gomez

Mitchell-Starc

Lendl Simmons

AB-de-Villiers

Andre Russell

Reese Witherspoon Blake Lively Lindsay Lohan Elizabeth Banks

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Nepal Tragedy Nepal Tragedy Patan Durbar Square Pagoda Temple

Alia Bhatt Shruti Haasan Ariana Grande Blake Lively

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Preity Zinta

Richa Chadda

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Akshay Oberoi

Preity Zinta

Richa Chadda

Divya Dutta

Priyanka Chopra

Ekta Kapoor

Scarlett Johansson

Salman Khan

Jacqueline Fernandez

Anushka Sharma

Idris Elba

Ekta Kapoor

Jacqueline Fernandez

Sunny Leone

Anushka Sharma

Lisa Ray

Beyonce

Katy Perry

Jessica Alba	Vidya Balan	Madhurima Tuli	Salma Hayek
Mariah Carey	Angelina Jolie	PeeCee	Ball Talk - March 28
Chitrangada Singh	MS Dhoni	Divya Dutta	Ball Talk - March 27
Zoe Saldana	Ball Talk - March 26	Uma Thurman	Ball Talk- March 25
Sunny Leone	Ball Talk- March 24	Lily Collins	Ball Talk - March 23
Nargis Fakhri	Ball Talk - March 22	Lauren Gottlieb	Ball Talk - March 21
Kangana	Ball Talk - March 20	Deepika Padukone	Ball Talk-March 19

Alia Bhatt Ball Talk - March 18 Kate Winslet Ball Talk - March 17

Rihanna Ball Talk - March 16 Katy Perry Ball Talk - March 15

Ryan Gosling Ball Talk - March 14 Kangana Ranaut Ball Talk - March 13

Kashyap Parulekar
and Manasi ... Ball Talk - March 12 Jennifer Lopez Ball Talk - March 11

Jacqueline Fernandez Ball Talk - March 10 Alicia Keys Ball Talk - March 9

Richa Chadda Ball Talk - March 08 Michelle Williams Sarfaraz Ahmed

Ball Talk - March 6 Kristen Stewart Ball Talk - March 5 Jacqueline Fernandez

Ball Talk - March 4 Emily Blunt Swara Bhaskar Ball Talk - March 3

Ball Talk- March 2 Lupita-Nyong'o Ball Talk - March1 Ball Tall - Feb 28

Fawad Khan Ball Talk - Feb 27 Ball Talk - Feb 26 Halle Berry

Ball Talk - Feb 25 Halle Berry Ball Talk - Feb 24 Gauhar Khan

Ball Talk- Feb 21 Ball Talk - Feb 20 Amy Jackson Ball Talk - Feb 19

Ball Talk - Feb 18 Amy Jackson Ball Talk- Feb 17 Victoria Beckham

Ball Talk - Feb16 Sarah-Jane Dias Ball-Talk - Feb 15 Jacqueline Fernandez

Ball Talk - Feb 14 Shahid Kapoor Felicity Jones Shreyas Talpade

M S Dhoni Nimrat Kaur Sunny Leone Kareena

Dakota Johnson Shikhar Dhawan Rafael Nadal Sean Abbott

Beyonce Fernando Torres Lana Del Ray Ana-Ivanovic

Jennifer Lawrence Sofia-Black-D-Elia Cara Delevingne Dakota Johnson

Jennifer Hudson Ayushmann Khurrana Sonakshi Sinha Actress Anna Kendrick

Dhanush Jacqueline Fernandez Kangana Ranaut Sapna Pabbi

Meera Chopra	Sienna Miller	Patrick Schwarzenegger	Bradley Cooper
Jessica Alba	Idris Elba	Alicia Keys	Mona Singh
Sonakshi-Sinha	Ashton Kutcher and Mila Kunis	Milla Jovovich	Singer Ariana Grande
Angelina Jolie	Emma Watson	Main Aur Mr. Right	Gauhar Khan
Karrueche Tran	Kate Hudson and Matt Bellamy	Happy Journey	Alia Bhatt
Zarine Khan	Penelope Cruz	Jennifer Garner	Jennifer Lopez
Nicole Scherzinger	Singer Adele	Sonakshi Sinha	Adele

Parineeti Chopra Cara Delevingne Amanda Bynes Randeep Hooda

Abhay Deol Angelina Jolie Sana Khan Lindsay Lohan

Kaley Cuoco Freida Pinto Amruta Subhash and
Bharat Jad... Milla Jovovich

Demi Lavato Singer Beyonce
Knowles Amanda Bynes Lisa Haydon

Ridhima Sud Chitrangada Singh Penelope Cruz Lisa Ray

Elizabeth Hurley Alia Bhatt Nawazuddin Siddiqui Iman Ali

Tina Fey Jennifer Lopez Dean O'Gorman Rihanna

Joseph Gordon-Levitt Singer Lana Del Rey Kendall Jenner Katie Holmes

Taylor Swift Liv Tyler Madhurima Tuli Jennifer Lopez

Cate Blanchett Megan Fox Julia Roberts Lea Seydoux

Lindsay Lohan Dia Mirza Ellen Pompeo Megan Fox

Jennifer Lawrence Hrithik Roshan Singer Cheryl Cole Singer Kesha

Whitney Houston Drew Barrymore Emraan Hashmi Lindsay Lohan

Sandra Bullock Vidya Balan Jessica Alba Paris Hilton

Pamela Anderson

Hrithik Roshan

Mila Kunis

Nicky Hilton

Singer Katy Perry

Megan Fox

Katie Price

Nicole Scherzinger

Keira-Knightley

Johnny Depp

Pierce-Brosnan

Alia Bhatt

Liv Tyler

Lindsay Lohan

Lana Del Rey

Brad-Pitt

Halle Berry

Selena-Gomez

Singer-Kesha

Gisele Bundchen

Kimberley Walsh

Lana Del Rey

Daniel Radcliffe

Keira Knightley

Bar Refaeli

Kate Hudson

Sigourney Weaver

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Reese Witherspoon Sofia-Vergara Amanda-Seyfried Rachel Stevens

Adam Levine Nicki Minaj Angelina Jolie Will Smith

Rihanna Chitragada-Singh Jennifer Lopez Britney Spears

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Cannes Watch

Paris-Hilton

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Cameron Diaz

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Citylights

Carmen Carrera

Tyra Banks

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Bradley Cooper

Prabhu Dheva

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Anne Hathaway

Hugh Jackman

Singer Eminem

Katy Perry

Miley Cyrus

Pallavi Sharda

Angelina Jolie

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