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Pro-choice activists have trained robots to deliver abortion pills to Northern Ireland

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"We demand that action is taken now."

Pro-choice activists have revealed that they will be using robots to deliver abortion pills to those in need in Northern Ireland.

The robot initiative has been set up by online medical abortion service Women on Web, pro-choice not-for-profit reproductive health service Women on Waves and socialist feminist movement ROSA Northern Ireland.

The robots aim to target the region's restrictive abortion laws and will serve as a signal to those watching the fight for stronger reproductive rights. The act will also be a totally legally binding one (<https://www.womenonwaves.org/en/page/7090/legal-background-abortion-robot-northern-ireland>), as the robots will be controlled from a state where abortion is legal, the Netherlands.

The Dutch abortion law does not apply because no treatment intended to end a pregnancy is provided in the Netherlands.

Women on Waves and Women on Web claim that although women in Northern Ireland would break the law if they were pregnant while taking the abortion pills, that "this is a matter of patient confidentiality and forcing women to undergo a pregnancy test would be a severe violation of their human rights."

As it currently stands, abortion is only legal in the North if the life of the woman is endangered.

The 1967 Abortion Act, which established legal abortion in England, Scotland and Wales for up to 24 weeks, has never applied in Northern Ireland. The north's abortion laws are still governed by sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/24-25/100/section/58>) as well as sections 25 of the Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 1945.

Medical abortion, that is abortion through the use of pills rather than a procedure, may be obtained by the use of two pills. First is Mifepristone, a hormone which blocks the production of progesterone – a hormone needed during pregnancy.

Second is Misoprostol, a prostaglandin which causes contractions of the womb, similar to a miscarriage.



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The possession of mifepristone in Northern Ireland can not be prosecuted under the Offences Against the Person Act 1861. Neither can swallowing the tablets.

The Belfast High Court ruled that laws governing abortion in Northern Ireland are in breach of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, on the right to privacy.

The robot is set to deliver the abortion pills outside Belfast Laganside Courts at 12pm GMT and 1pm Dutch time.

Solidarity TD Ruth Coppinger has travelled to Belfast, to show her support for what is believed to be the start of a sustained movement.

"The result of the repeal referendum was a reflection of seismic change in Southern society," Coppinger told JOE.

"Two thirds of voters opted to remove the odious eighth amendment from the Constitution. Almost twice as many women aged 18-24 voted in the referendum as in the 2016 general election. Every part of society was affected by this movement but the strongest Yes votes came from the working-class communities most effected by Ireland's abortion ban.

"People feel that, once again, Northern Ireland is being left behind, but a similar mood was also widespread in the South in the years prior to the referendum. For years, the political establishment were unified in their opposition to the right to choose. It took a movement of women, young people, LGBTQ+ people and working-class communities to drag Southern society into the 21st century."



Ruth Coppinger TD
@RuthCoppingerTD

Women and Trans people in the North should not be left behind. I'm travelling to Belfast at the moment to meet with [#Bus4Choice](#) initiated by [@ROSABelfast](#) and Women on Web. [#repealedthe8th](#) [#dubw](#) twitter.com/abortionpil/st...

11:42 AM - May 31, 2018

26 See Ruth Coppinger TD's other Tweets

Coppinger continued to praise ROSA and Women On Web's work, an organisation set up by Rebecca Gomperts.



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"The actions of ROSA and Women on Web - including the Abortion Pill Train, the #Bus4Repeal and the Abortion Drone - were key in this regard. I'm very happy now to be supporting today's action, which builds on that work. These acts of civil disobedience supplied pregnant people with safe but illegal abortion pills, but they were also instrumental in shifting the debate on abortion."

"Northern Ireland is the only region in these islands and one of the few pockets of Europe to deny abortion rights. Theresa May's praise for the referendum result and her ridiculous claims that she is a 'feminist' are nothing but empty words and utter hypocrisy, since she is not prepared to take action to extend abortion rights immediately to Northern Ireland.

"Arlene Foster's claims that the vote will have no impact in Northern Ireland are delusional. The DUP have no mandate for their undemocratic manoeuvres. Michelle O'Neill today blames the DUP and Tories for blocking equality, but only months ago she commented that Sinn Fein "isn't in favour of abortion".

"She and her party still oppose Westminster extending abortion rights to Northern Ireland. All the main parties seem to expect women and pregnant people to pin their hopes on the re-establishment of a Stormont Executive that can take action on abortion rights – yet ironically they are currently all pro-life. We won't wait!

"We demand that action is taken now. The politicians cannot be allowed to deliver for the women of Northern Ireland anything less than what exists for women and pregnant people in England, Scotland and Wales. Despite the outdated language and serious limitations, we demand that the already existing legislation in Britain - the 1967 Abortion Act - is immediately extended to Northern Ireland.

"At the same time we also support the fight for full decriminalisation of abortion across the UK by repealing sections 58 and 59 of the Victorian 1861 Offences Against the Person Act."

After the remote delivery of the abortion pills, the abortion bus will then drive around Northern Ireland to offer abortion counselling and ultrasounds.

Following this, the bus will travel through Northern Ireland and finish in Derry, ending its journey near Guildhall Square.

The event will be live-streamed from both the Women on Web Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/womenonwebif/>) and Women on Waves Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/womenonwaves/>).

In a press briefing last month, Head of Women on Web, Dr Gomperts claimed that, according to her research, a medical abortion has the same health impact as a spontaneous miscarriage (<https://www.joe.ie/fitness-health/abortion-pills-ruth-copping-624526>).

She confirmed via her research that there are no records of mental health problems being caused by an abortion.

As for the claim that medication abortion can cause breast cancer, Gomperts referred to this as "another lie spread by the anti-abortion groups".

"I knew I had to get out of that job because I'm sitting in front of a computer for too many hours of the day. That was never me."

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