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The banner features a cartoon illustration of a man with a beard and glasses sitting at a desk with a laptop. The laptop has the 'duda' logo on it. There are also icons of a potted plant, a pen, and a coffee cup.

Voices

# *At the age of 71, I handed myself in to police for helping women in the UK to get an abortion*

There is a civic duty to obey a just law, but there is a moral duty to disobey an unjust law

Diana King | Sunday 29 May 2016 17:26 | [5 comments](#)

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Protesters on the 'Annual March for Choice' in Dublin, Ireland in 2014 (Rex)

Derry is a city full of kindnesses. It is a city blessed with a culture of women helping women. But in 1966 there was an oppressive silence throughout the whole of Northern Ireland. The catalyst? **Abortion.**

A group of forward-thinking and courageous women set up **Alliance for Choice** in Derry to promote reform, discussion of abortion and changes to abortion law; their work continues today.

In 1967, the UK Abortion Act was introduced – but not in Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland it rescued only those women who could afford travel to Britain for a legal abortion.

In the 1970s, I was working for Belfast Welfare Department as a social worker. The only abortions poorer people with crisis pregnancies could afford then were on the backstreets and they were very dangerous. Better-off women could afford to travel and pay for access to legal abortion in Britain.



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That remains the case in 2016, when travel, abortion and accommodation costs to facilitate a termination total up to £2,000. In short, poor women who want a choice don't have one.

That is why the introduction of the nine-week abortion pills on the internet, made available five years ago, was so significant. It made abortion during the first nine weeks of pregnancy affordable for poorer women in Northern Ireland for the first time – £60, or free.

**Women on Web** is run legally as a charity in Holland offering GP consultation, pills and post-procedure counselling, if necessary. But late last year, a young woman who had procured the nine-week abortion pills was pulled before Belfast Court, tried and handed a one year suspended sentence, for accessing these pills.



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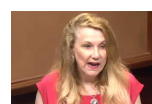
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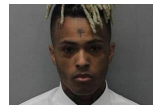
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This came as a complete shock. People were angry, frightened and distressed. That arrest and conviction has since been followed up by charges against a mother who procured the pills for her teenage daughter.

People in Northern Ireland are outraged that women coping as best they can with a pregnancy which already presents a crisis for them are then being dragged before our courts. They are being threatened with life imprisonment under our archaic 1861 Offences against the Person Act.

The outrage is legitimate as only poorer women are the true victims. Women who can access the considerable amount of money needed to travel to Britain for a legal abortion will not be touched by this regressive legislative precedent.

You need only fear jail if you are women who chooses to access affordable abortion pills, Mifepristone and Misoprostol, online – the very same pills recommended by the World Health Organisation. We have one law for the rich and another for the poor.

So, along with two other Derry women, at the age of 71, I decided enough was enough: I handed myself in to police for being involved in the procuring of abortion pills for women who cannot afford to travel and are too terrified to have them delivered to their home address, as a protest against the law.

We are three of many. There



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are hundreds of us out there breaking the existing law in Northern Ireland. Why are the police pursuing women in the most vulnerable of circumstances?

We don't respect the law because it is archaic, irrelevant and unfair. However, we don't believe that we are committing a crime because, as one fellow campaigner put it, "there is a civic duty to obey a just law, but there is a moral duty to disobey an unjust law".

The 1967 UK Abortion Act should be introduced across Northern Ireland, but our government is letting people down. They simply turn their backs and look away.

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As you near the end of your own life, you want to make sure that unborn don't get the chance that you had. You ain't no heroine, you are just a nasty old woman.

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I do believe in early abortion for social reasons, but I remember some years back the Northern Irish took a vote not to allow it. Perhaps it ought to be revisited, but I wonder if a different result will happen. I don't think abortion comes under the ECHR legislation, but perhaps some readers know more about this.

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Northern Ireland - a backward country with a backward religion. No wonder it's full of terrorists.

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**legenda**

2 years ago

I wish as I think many do, that NI that declare independence and go its own way.

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