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Abortion Ship Heads For Morocco Amid Anger

A floating clinic intends to avoid strict Moroccan abortion law by mooring in international waters off the port of Smir.

3:41pm UK, Wednesday 03 October 2012



The Langenort, before an earlier visit to Poland

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An 'abortion boat' set up to perform pregnancy terminations while moored in international waters is due to arrive off the coast of Morocco this week.

The Dutch non-profit organisation [Women on Waves](#), which has organised the visit, says the ship will anchor at Smir, in northern Morocco on Thursday afternoon.

As the vessel will only be active outside Moroccan territory, it will circumvent the country's law under which abortion is illegal.

The group says the purpose of the visit is to provide women with "safe legal medical abortions" up to six-and-a-half weeks into pregnancy, in a country where the practice is illegal and can expose women to health risks.

Dr Rebecca Gomperts, the founder of Women on Waves, justified the ship's arrival due to the fact that around 600 to 800 Moroccan women have an abortion every day.



The ship will anchor off the Moroccan port of Smir

"The problem is that only about 200 cases are done properly, by women who have money," Dr Gomperts said. "The rest resort to dangerous methods because they are unable to afford the expensive treatment."

This leads to the deaths of 78 Moroccan women each year on average, Dr Gomperts claimed, citing statistics provided by the World Health Organisation.

But Muslim campaigners have expressed anger at the planned arrival.

"Moroccan law forbids abortion. Moroccan religious identity says it is forbidden and so does Islam," lawyer Abdelmalik Zaza was quoted as saying in the newspaper of ruling Islamist Party of Justice and Development.



Women on Waves activist Dr Rebecca Gomperts (pic: Willem Velthoven)

Chafik Chraibi, who heads a Moroccan organisation that seeks to perform abortions legally, also opposed the visit.

"It's true the initiative is symbolic, to defend the rights of women to have abortions," he told independent Moroccan newspaper, Le Soir.

"But to practice abortion at sea, in international waters, is for me a way of circumventing the law and is something clandestine," he added.

Many in Morocco expect the boat to be turned away by the country's authorities.

But Moroccan pro-life groups deny those figures, and dispute the motives of the local youth group the Alternative Movement for Individual Liberties (MALI) that is helping to organise the visit.

"The figures on abortion are not right," Hannan Idrissi, a member of a Moroccan pro-life group, was quoted as saying by Al-Tajdid.

"The MALI movement that invited the ship is known for its disrespect for ethics and the dignity of Moroccan society," she added.

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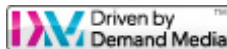


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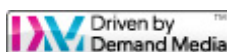
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