

## HEALTH

## Drone set to deliver abortion pills to Ireland

By **Eilish O'Gara** 6/30/15 at 3:01 PM

A women's rights group say they are planning on distributing abortion medication by drone in Ireland after they **successfully delivered a batch of pills** from Germany to Poland last week.

The drone set off from Frankfurt an der Oder, on the border with Poland, and delivered the medication to two pregnant women waiting in Slubice who then took the pills, which had been prescribed by a German doctor. After the drone had landed, German police arrived and confiscated the pilot's controllers and iPad, although no one was arrested.

Dr Rebecca Gomperts, founder and director of Women on Waves, the not-for-profit organisation that sent the drone, and also operates a boat that carries out abortions off the coast of countries where the procedure is illegal, tells *Newsweek* that the first flight had been a great success and confirmed that the organisation now has plans to expand the project to other countries, including Ireland and Argentina, where women's access to abortions are also severely restricted.

Abortion laws have been severely restricted since 1993 in Poland, which is 90% Catholic, and women are only allowed to have an abortion in cases of rape, incest, if the fetus is severely damaged or if pregnancy poses a significant risk to the health of the mother.

Although pregnant women in Poland are not criminalised for having an abortion, those who distribute abortion medication or illegally perform a termination can be prosecuted. As a result, according to a recent UN report, there are more than 50,000 dangerous underground abortions carried out in the country each year.

Women on Waves say German authorities are now seeking to press criminal charges against those involved in the drone's first flight, but add that it is "totally unclear on what grounds they can take legal action".

Gomperts adds that several supportive members of the Polish parliament were in attendance on the Polish side of the border, and no police arrived.

"Whilst we were wrapping up, a very small group of anti-abortion activists showed up, but other than that it all was very quiet." The number of activists were so small on the Polish side of the river that

Gomperts says it was a positive sign that "the anti-abortion activists had clearly failed to mobilise a high number of people to turn up to the event". "Once we have our controllers back from the German police we can begin planning other missions with the drone," Gomperts says. However the legal implications of sending a drone to women in Ireland, who can be prosecuted for taking the abortion pill themselves, will need to be addressed, she adds.

Ireland is going through a real social revolution, Gomperts says, adding that "many people are really fed up with the fact that the government is not in touch with the sentiments of the people who really want women to have access to abortions".

The organisation have previously taken their boat to locations of the coast of Poland, Ireland, Spain, Portugal and Morocco, distributing mifepristone and misoprostol tablets to women up to six-and-a-half weeks pregnant once they are in international waters.

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