

SEARCH

- Front
- Sections
- Topics
- Video
- Audio
- Data
- Join Us
- About Us

NEWS : ABORTION

What the 'Abortion Drone' Will (And Won't) Mean for Reproductive Rights



by [Emily Crockett](#), Federal Policy Reporter, RH Reality Check
June 26, 2015 - 10:48 am

The first-ever “abortion drone” is [scheduled to launch Saturday](#) and deliver abortion pills to women in Poland, getting around that country’s restrictive abortion laws.

The action is causing a splash in the media and excited buzz among reproductive rights advocates, some of whom [envision a future](#) in which reactionary state legislatures are no match for nimble robots armed with mifepristone and misoprostol. But the drone has also become a source of misinformation and anxiety, with some media reports garbling the facts and some activists questioning the project’s methods.

The innovative and unusual use of technology has the media’s attention, with Gizmodo raving that “[Abortion Drone is the Best Drone](#)” and [comparisons](#) being made to Amazon and Google’s proposed drone delivery services. Meanwhile, anti-choice groups in Poland have reportedly vowed to [shoot the drone down](#) if they can find it.

The headline-grabbing campaign is the brainchild of Women on Waves, a Dutch group known for keeping [ships in international waters](#) to give safe medication abortions to women living in countries that have outlawed abortion care.

Many media reports have been confused and inaccurate about how the drone’s pill distribution will work, Rebecca Gomperts, founder and director of Women on Waves, told *RH Reality Check* in an interview.

Some reports have said that the pills [will go to women’s groups](#) who will then distribute the pills to women in need, or that the drones will [drop packages](#) over the Polish town.

“It’s not going to drop boxes full of abortion pills over Poland,” Gomperts said, laughing. “That’s ridiculous. It’s not how we work.”

rhrc.us/1LzRBwz **COPY**

Tweet 16



The Poland "abortion drone" is causing a splash in the media and excited buzz in the reproductive rights community, but it has also become a source of misinformation and anxiety. *(Shutterstock)*

Twitter

Follow @rhrealitycheck 34.1K followers

RH Reality Check @rhrealitycheck 2m

#TitleXAt43: How We Talk About the Landmark Anti-Discrimination Legislation [rhrc.us/1JonAPR](#) by @EchoingIlda's @GloriaMalone #TitleX

Show Summary

RH Reality Check @rhrealitycheck 32m

"Access to contraception and abortion services is an LGBTQ issue as much as anyone's" [rhrc.us/1HkOwzD](#) by @mombian #ProChoiceParents



Facebook

Like 67,495 people like this. [Sign Up](#) to see what your friends like.

Popular Today This Week Discussions

Another report said Gomperts [refused to say](#) who the pills would go to and how.

But Gomperts set the record straight to *RH Reality Check* in no uncertain terms: The pills will go directly from the drone to the women who are seeking an early abortion, with no intermediaries, she said. That means the [local women's groups](#) openly participating in the action won't be putting themselves at risk by illegally distributing the medication.

The women seeking abortion care are involved with those local groups, Gomperts explained, but only the women who are taking the pills will handle them. Women on Waves will confirm the women's identities both in person and with a camera on the drone.

The drone will be small, less than five kilograms, and it won't travel far—just a quick jump across a river and an international border, from Frankfurt an der Oder in Germany (where abortion is legal) to the town of Stubice, Poland (where it isn't), staying within eyesight the whole way to comply with drone regulations.

The drone will carry mifepristone and misoprostol, a combination of drugs [approved](#) by the World Health Organization for safe termination of a pregnancy of up to nine weeks. Only two or three women are expected to take the pills—as long as they are still ready and willing to take the drugs on the day of the launch.

“We want to give space to them to decide to do it or not to do it,” Gomperts said.

The drone's mission, Gomperts said, is twofold: providing a few women access to needed services, and raising awareness about the [social injustices](#) of illegal abortion.

That awareness serves both to inform women that [they have the power](#) to safely terminate their own pregnancies, Gomperts said, and to put pressure on governments to change their draconian anti-choice policies. Poland [prohibits](#) abortion except in very limited circumstances, and even then allows doctors to [opt out](#) of performing the procedure.

The drone operation is legal, or at least not technically illegal. The scale is small enough that no authorization is needed from either the German or Polish governments. And since Poland only criminalizes doctors who perform illegal abortions, not women who abort their own pregnancies, the women who will take the pills on the other side of the river shouldn't be in any legal danger.

Gomperts said the local women's health activists in Poland, who she has been in contact with since an earlier [ship campaign](#) in 2003, jumped at the chance to participate in the drone campaign.

“The Polish groups are very excited, and they are very happy to do this,” Gomperts said.

Some reproductive rights activists in other countries, however, are less enthused about the idea of an abortion drone coming to their borders.

The *Global Post* [reported](#) that Gomperts plans to try the drone program in other countries where abortion is illegal or restricted, such as Ireland, Brazil, and Mexico, if Saturday's delivery is a success.

Sonia Correa, co-chair of the global research forum Sexuality Policy Watch and a longtime reproductive rights activist in Brazil, told *RH Reality Check* that she and several other activists in her network were “horrified” at the prospect of abortion drones coming to Brazil.



[Unsayable? To the Contrary, Negative Stereotypes of Trans Women Are Heard Far Too Often](#)

by Katherine Cross



[Eleanor Holmes Norton Dares House GOP to Overturn New D.C. Law: 'Go Ahead'](#)

by Emily Crockett

[Louisiana Rescinds Anti-Choice Regulation](#)



[After Planned Parenthood Challenge](#)

by Teddy Wilson



[Investigative Report: How Victim-Blaming Led to the Rape Kit Backlog](#)

by Sofia Resnick



[Heroes in Their Own Right: What Clinic Staff Do, and Why They Do It](#)

by Paul Brink



[Supreme Court Rules for Marriage Equality](#)

by Jessica Mason Pieklo



[We're Tired, Yes, But We Must Continue Talking About Racial Injustice](#)

by Jyarland Daniels



[Sex Ed Mandatory in Hawaii Schools After Years of Misinformation](#)

by Martha Kempner



[Roberts Court Once More Rules in Favor of the Affordable Care Act](#)

by Jessica Mason Pieklo



[Justice Kennedy Emerges As Important, Complicated Voice on Race in Fair Housing Case](#)

by Jessica Mason Pieklo

Mason Pieklo

RH Wire

[My black hair: a tangled story of race and politics in America](#) - Quartz

[These Teens Just Dreamed Up Condoms That Change Color To Detect STIs](#) - Mic

[The Number of Uninsured Americans Continues to Drop](#) - TIME

[Women Are Sharing the Incredible Ways Birth Control Has Helped Them](#) - Mic

[UVa research could lead to development of male contraception](#) - The Daily Progress

[The Path to Defeat Racism](#) - Huffington Post

“It’s just going to be an additional problem to cope with,” Correa said. “We need people to understand the conditions in which we are operating, and whatever type of support they provide needs to be in tandem with an understanding of the context and in negotiation with us. It cannot be parachuted.”

Correa said the current political regime in Brazil is so regressive and sexually repressive that the risk of backlash from such a splashy media event would be too great.

Women are already being prosecuted as smugglers for taking misoprostol, which is illegal in Brazil, Correa said. She envisions police staking out a previously advertised abortion drone site to make arrests, or anti-choice groups capitalizing on the event to demonize feminists as using “weapons of mass destruction,” drones, against unborn children.

“For those of us who have been for so many years struggling for abortion rights within a solid human rights frame, a health rights frame—to see the right to abortion be so intimately associated with an instrument that in the popular imagination is correctly seen as an instrument of war ... that imagery is very troubling and negative,” Correa said.

Gomperts clarified to *RH Reality Check* that Women on Waves doesn’t have plans right now to go to Brazil or the other countries mentioned by the *Global Post*, and that the organization always consults closely with local groups before taking action. She mentioned those places as potential candidates for future actions, she said, but she recognizes that a country like Brazil with more restrictive policies would require a different approach.

“I really want to focus on what’s going to happen here [in Poland],” Gomperts said. “We don’t know what’s going to happen, so we have to really learn from this moment and then make decisions on where and how and what we can do in the future.”

She added that drones are also increasingly used for [humanitarian](#) and [commercial](#) purposes, and she urged activists not to restrict their strategies based on fears of backlash.

“The anti-abortion groups will say whatever they want. They will use anything,” Gompert said. “I think it’s more important to stay positive and creative and try to find indeterminate legal spaces where you can actually move ahead and create change ... than to be afraid of backlashes.”

Other reproductive rights advocates are cheering the campaign as an innovative action that could help expand access to safe abortion.

“I think it’s a really excellent way of calling attention to the fact that women want access to safe abortion, and they are willing to do whatever it takes to get it,” Alice Mark, senior clinical advisor to the international reproductive rights group Ipas, told *RH Reality Check*. “This is one possible way of getting the safest medications into their hands.”

Writing for *Dame Magazine*, reproductive rights journalist Robin Marty [fantasizes](#) about a “drone-led abortion revolution” that wouldn’t just work within the increasingly restrictive anti-choice regime in the United States, but instead “break it wide open.”

Gomperts said the United States is unlikely to see a Women on Waves drone, even though she decries the “desperate” and “unbelievable” situation where women in states like [Texas](#) are running out of options for safe abortion access. Her organization prefers to focus on countries in which abortion is illegal and women have even fewer options, she said.

Still, she hopes abortion rights groups in the United States might follow her lead someday. She's excited about the possibilities for the technology, and she hopes it might give a boost of positive energy to activists who are burned out by relentless attacks on women's human rights.

"It also has something fun about it," Gomperts said. "Of course you're not allowed to say 'fun' when you're talking about abortion, but it's not just negativity and heaviness and suffering. I mean, abortion is also a positive experience for a lot of people."

Like this story? Your \$10 tax-deductible contribution helps support our research, reporting, and analysis.

To schedule an interview with *Emily Crockett* contact director of communications *Rachel Perrone* at rachel@rhrealitycheck.org.

Tagged: [Abortion](#), [abortion access](#), [Abortion Care](#), [abortion laws](#), [Abortion restrictions](#), [Access to abortion](#), [Health Systems](#), [Human Rights](#), [Illegal abortion](#), [International Abortion Access](#), [Mifepristone](#), [Misoprostol](#), [News](#), [Reproductive rights](#), [Safe Abortion Care](#), [Texas](#), [Women on Waves](#)

0 Comments

RH Reality Check

Login ▾

Recommend

Share

Sort by Best ▾



Start the discussion...

Be the first to comment.

Subscribe

Add Disqus to your site

Privacy

Topics

- [Abortion](#)
- [Contraception](#)
- [Faith and Ideology](#)
- [Family](#)
- [Health Systems](#)
- [Law and Policy](#)
- [Maternity and Birthing](#)

- [Media](#)
- [Politics](#)
- [Race and Class](#)
- [Sexual Health](#)
- [Sexuality](#)
- [Violence](#)

Social Media

- [Facebook](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Tumblr](#)
- [You Tube](#)
- [Reddit](#)
- [Digg](#)

More

- [Login](#)
- [RHRC Data](#)
- [Donate](#)
- [About *RH Reality Check*](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Daily and Weekly Emails](#)
- [RSS](#)
- [Jobs](#)