

Amnesty International is holding its International Council Meeting in Dublin

Andrew Flood

August 10, 2015

Under the law introduced by the current government anyone who obtains an abortion in southern Ireland could be jailed for as much as 14 years for doing so, as could anyone who aids them. Labour Party supporters tried to justify their parties actions in introducing such a law by suggesting such a prosecution is unlikely but this summer we have seen a mother being prosecuted under the very similar laws in the north for supplying her own daughter with the pills needed for a medical abortion. It's estimated that hundreds of women in the south already use such pills.

A similar prosecution here is a constant possibility.

Amnesty have presented their position in a straightforward manner

“She is pregnant. She needs an abortion.

If she can afford it, she travels abroad for the treatment she needs. If she can't, she takes the abortion pill in Ireland – and breaks the law.

She shouldn't be denied the healthcare that is her right.

She is a woman who needs an abortion.

She is not a criminal.”

They they go on to note the following “Six outrageous facts about abortion in Ireland”

1. In Ireland, abortion is only allowed if you are in immediate danger of dying. Abortion is banned except where there is a risk to your life – but not health. The definition of “risk” is narrow and vague. So it's almost impossible to actually have an abortion in Ireland.
2. Breaking Ireland's abortion law could get you 14 years in jail or a €4,000 fine. If you have an illegal abortion in Ireland, you risk 14 years in prison. If you're a healthcare provider and refer a woman to seek an abortion abroad, it's a fine of up to €4,000. Ireland's abortion law criminalizes women, girls and the health care professionals who try to help them.
3. A woman must carry to full term a foetus that won't live. If a woman is carrying a foetus that is unlikely to survive, she must still carry that pregnancy to term under Irish law. The trauma of doing this is summed up by Grainne: “How cruel would it be to make me go

through this... To put me through a full pregnancy. I would have the breast milk, I would have everybody asking me how long are you gone?... How could they think that would not affect someone mentally?”

4. Equal right to life. Not equal in practice. The 8th Amendment to Ireland’s Constitution, made in 1983, protects the right to life of the foetus and places it on an equal footing with the right to life of the woman. Most of the women and health professionals Amnesty spoke to, said that a woman’s rights inevitably come second. Lupe, a woman who was forced to carry a dead foetus for two months, told us: “When a woman gets pregnant in Ireland, she loses her human rights.”
5. Ireland is happy for you to have an abortion – as long as it’s not in Ireland. Under Irish law, it’s legal to travel abroad to get an abortion, prompting the criticism that Ireland is happy to export its human rights responsibilities. Emma Kitson, who went to the UK for an abortion because her foetus had a fatal medical condition, said: “We deserved to have support within the Irish health care system, to get us through that... They export the problem and they forget all about you.”
6. Each year, about 4,000 women and girls leave Ireland to have an abortion in the UK. Many feel like criminals for doing this. As Cerys, who travelled to the UK for an abortion, put it: “I am a law-abiding citizen and I felt like I was committing a crime, like I was smuggling drugs across the border. That feeling was horrible.”

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