

Guatemala Reacts to the ‘Abortion Boat’

By Astrid Ríos de Marroquín [\[1\]](#)

On February 22, Guatemala was the target of actions by the Dutch organization Women on Waves. This organization, founded in 1999 by Rebecca Comperts, aims to offer abortions for women with unwanted pregnancies by providing them with and teaching them to use abortifacient pills. Its modus operandi is to position a boat in international waters – in front of countries where abortion is penalized[\[2\]](#) – and bring women seeking abortions onto the boat. Thus the laws of the nation the ship belongs to will apply, not the laws of the countries the women are from. The ship comes from Austria, where abortion is permitted.

The promotion started with an announcement on Women on Waves’ website saying that the organization would be in Guatemalan territory with the boat to offer abortions. They announced that a telephone line would be available so that women, regardless of whether they were of legal age or not, could schedule a pregnancy termination. They also offered a press conference so that the media could publicize the purpose of their arrival in Guatemala.

Against this background, some deputies of the Congress of Guatemala presented an urgent request[\[3\]](#) asking the Executive to immediately expel the ship since the ship’s crew was instigating the commission of the crime of abortion. However, due to lack of quorum in the Congress of the Republic, the request was not approved and had no legal effects.

With the purpose of protecting the nation’s sovereignty and the unborn, the President of the Republic ordered the Navy to guard the boat to prevent it from carrying out illegal acts in Guatemalan territory. The presidential order also prevented Guatemalan women from leaving the territory and boarding the boat. In this way, the State of Guatemala had initial success preventing Women on Waves from carrying out its mission.

Women on Waves did not remain passive in the face of this obstacle. In response, they filed actions in Guatemalan Courts seeking to receive protection and respect for their ability to promote what they call “safe abortion.” As a matter of enforcing Guatemalan law and preserving the rule of law, these actions were not successful.

Later, the Migration Office Director found out that the purpose of Women on Waves’ boat was to perform abortions on international waters and to teach Guatemalan women how to use abortifacients. Because Women on Waves declared under oath upon entering Guatemala that the purpose of their visit was exclusively for tourism, the immediate expulsion of the ship was legally possible since the Guatemalan Migration Law and its Regulation establishes that making false declarations to obtain a tourist card is grounds for expulsion.

Although the crew was notified of their expulsion from the Guatemalan territory, they did not want to comply with the order and decided to remain anchored. Four days later, with no alternatives and no arguments or legal remedies left to file against the expulsion order, the boat and its crew left the waters of the State of Guatemala.

Although the expulsion of the boat was a victory, the fight against Women on Waves’ attack on Guatemala’s most vulnerable has not ended. A telephone line is still available for Guatemalan women to call and be referred to national and international organizations that can help provide abortifacients. Women on Waves is still cooperating with Guatemalan organizations as an accomplice to dozens of clandestine abortions. They even claim on their website that they have referred more than 60 Guatemalan women seeking abortions to other organizations that encourage abortions[\[4\]](#).

In light of what has happened, the Guatemalan authorities have an obligation to open an investigation into the irregularities that have come to light in this context. For example, they might investigate the

Guatemalan organizations that were partnering with Women on Waves to promote abortions in international and national waters. They could search for the person in charge of the telephone line that Women on Waves is still operating[5]. Although they did not perform abortions, they did commit the crime of inciting women to seek illegal abortions. So far, the Public Prosecutor's Office has not spoken publicly or made an official communiqué explaining the delay in an investigation.

Thanks to the efforts of the Guatemalan authorities and many of its citizens, Guatemalan women were protected from irreversible physical and psychological damages. While many innocent lives could have been lost, Guatemalan women could have been among the women who often publish heartbreaking testimonies on the Women on Waves page[6] filled with pain, guilt, regret, sadness and depression in the aftermath of an abortion. These testimonies compel us to continue fighting against the culture of death. These women experienced in their own flesh the consequences of the lies of "safe abortion" and "the human right to abortion."

Guatemala was the first Latin American country to which Women on Waves has brought its boat, but it will not be the last. February 22 may have been the beginning of a systematic attack against unborn Latin American children, but we are also convinced that it will be remembered in history as the beginning of a systematized international defense of the right to life from conception. United as Latin Americans and as the voice of children who cannot express their desire to live, we will win the war against the culture of death.

[1] Lawyer and Notary by Francisco Marroquin University, Guatemala. ADF Arete Academy 2012, Blackstone Fellow 2014, spokeswoman for the Family Imports Association (AFI).

[2] GUATEMALAN PENAL CODE: *Article 137. An abortion practiced by a doctor, with the consent of the woman, prior to a favorable diagnostic of at least one other physician is not punishable if the abortion was practiced without the intention of directly causing the death of the product of conception but with the only purpose being to avoid a risk, properly demonstrated, to the life of the mother, after having exhausted every scientific and technical means.*

[3] Guatemala foresees an urgent measure that can be presented by one or more deputies to discuss in plenary a certain issue and displace the ordinary agenda.

[4] Cf. Testimony about campaign results on the official Women on Waves website. Available at: <https://www.womenonwaves.org/en/page/6686/abortion-ship-in-guatemala>

[5] Newspaper Prensa Libre. Photo published with pro-abortion activists holding a poster with the telephone line number.

Available at: <http://www.prensalibre.com/guatemala/comunitario/barco-de-abortos-se-fue-pero-la-polemica-sigue>

[6] Women's testimonies that have had an abortion assisted by Women on Waves. Available at the following link: <https://www.womenonweb.org/en/page/488/>