

## RTÉ bought abortion pills – but it didn't break any rules

The abortion drugs were imported to Ireland via a post office in Northern Ireland for purpose of an investigation.

THE BROADCASTING AUTHORITY of Ireland has rejected a complaint about RTE's Prime Time buying abortion pills.

The abortion drugs were imported to Ireland via a post office in Northern Ireland for purpose of an investigation.

The complainant to the BAI states the programme showed how the tablets can be purchased on a website and how they can be "illegally imported into Ireland for the purpose of engaging in criminal activity, namely the termination of the lives of unborn children, contrary to the law and the Constitution".

In the complainants opinion, RTÉ gave more time to those in favour of abortion.

### **In the public interest**

In reply, RTÉ said that neither Prime Time nor RTÉ has any agenda beyond broadcasting items which they feel are in the public interest.

Prime Time is aware of its obligations not to promote or incite crime and RTÉ's has clear guidelines which must be followed when any item, such as their report on abortion pills, is being planned.

In this case, it said detailed consideration was given to the issue and the matter was referred to a senior editorial figure for consideration.

### **Fair and objective reporting**

The BAI found the Prime Time report and discussion were presented in a fair, objective, and impartial manner.

The fact that, in ascertaining in the report whether or not the law on prescription medicines could be easily circumvented, RTÉ necessarily made a 'donation' of €90 to the organisation WomenOnWeb, as 'patients' are requested to do, in no way compromised that objectivity or impartiality, as can be seen clearly in the report and the conduct of the discussion.

The BAI said the videotaped report explained how the group WomenOnWeb had been advertising the availability of abortion pills online through notices on the street in Dublin city centre.



Image: Shutterstock/isak55

As a necessary demonstration in the public interest of the fact of this availability, the reporter pursued the advertised process, ordering the abortion pills, demonstrating and explaining to the viewer how she was assisted in circumventing the law by the group WomenOnWeb, and collecting the pills, as ordered, from Northern Ireland.

It also found that the broadcaster engaged extensively with the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA, formerly the Irish Medicines Board).

### **Tackling illegal supply**

One of the aims of the HPRA is tackling the activities of suppliers, it said.

The suppliers, in this instance, would be the organisation WomenOnWeb.

The medicines obtained were of course not used in any way, including the purpose for which they were ostensibly requested, and supplied; they were provided to the HPRA for safe disposal.

The broadcaster states that crime is a key issue for any current affairs programme.

Within that, any area where the law may be being flouted or broken so often, or so easily, as to bring it into disrepute, is of particular concern. It is clearly in the public interest to bring those areas to public and political attention.

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