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HEALTH

Brazil Confiscates Abortion Pills From Pregnant Women Exposed To Zika

BY **ALEX ZIELINSKI** MAR 28, 2016 11:14 AM

CREDIT: AP PHOTO, FELIPE DANA

In this Feb. 12, 2016 photo a baby born with microcephaly is examined by a neurologist in Campina Grande in Paraiba state, Brazil.

"I contacted Zika four days ago. I just found out I'm about six weeks pregnant. I have a son I love dearly. I love children. But I don't believe it is a wise decision to keep a baby who will suffer. I need an abortion. I don't know who to turn to. Please help me ASAP."

This plea comes from one of the 20,000 emails sent by Latin American women to Women on Web, the international abortion advocacy organization that's been sending free abortion pills to Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and other Zika-infected countries where abortion is illegal or nearly impossible to access. At least, until recently.

Women on Web discovered that officials have confiscated almost all of the pills shipped to Brazil, where more than 4,000 women have given birth to babies born with shrunken skulls — a condition linked to the Zika virus. Forced to stop all further shipments to the country, staff are struggling to find other ways to get the medication to concerned women.

"It's not fair to tell women they are going to get a package, and it will not arrive to them," Leticia Zenevich, a spokesperson for Women on Web, told the Los Angeles Times.

Instead, the organization won't be blocked, like Ar largely living below the p to another country is an

Without access to this m abortion in the country, l

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(which rarely work) or cheap, unsafe illegal abortions.

“We have a situation here in Brazil in which women are having clandestine abortions, and in which women are dying,” Sonia Coelho, a spokesperson for the National Campaign for the Legalization of Abortion, told the Los Angeles Times. “This brings consequences ... principally for poorer women and black women, who lack the means to have an abortion in a safer place.”

Drug confiscation isn't the only new barrier the country has built to deny a woman's access to a safe abortion during the Zika crisis.

In Brazil, a woman who undergoes an illegal abortion can currently be stuck with one to three years' imprisonment. A new bill, however, is aiming to increase sentencing minimums to four-and-a-half years if a court finds a woman's abortion based on fetal brain damage like microcephaly, the fetal skull symptom linked to Zika.

Women on Web, which will keep shipping pills to other countries in need, has continued to receive panicked letters from women in Brazil.

“Here in my town there's nothing else to do,” wrote a woman whose medication was confiscated twice by the government. “It's either your service or nothing.”

From the Web

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