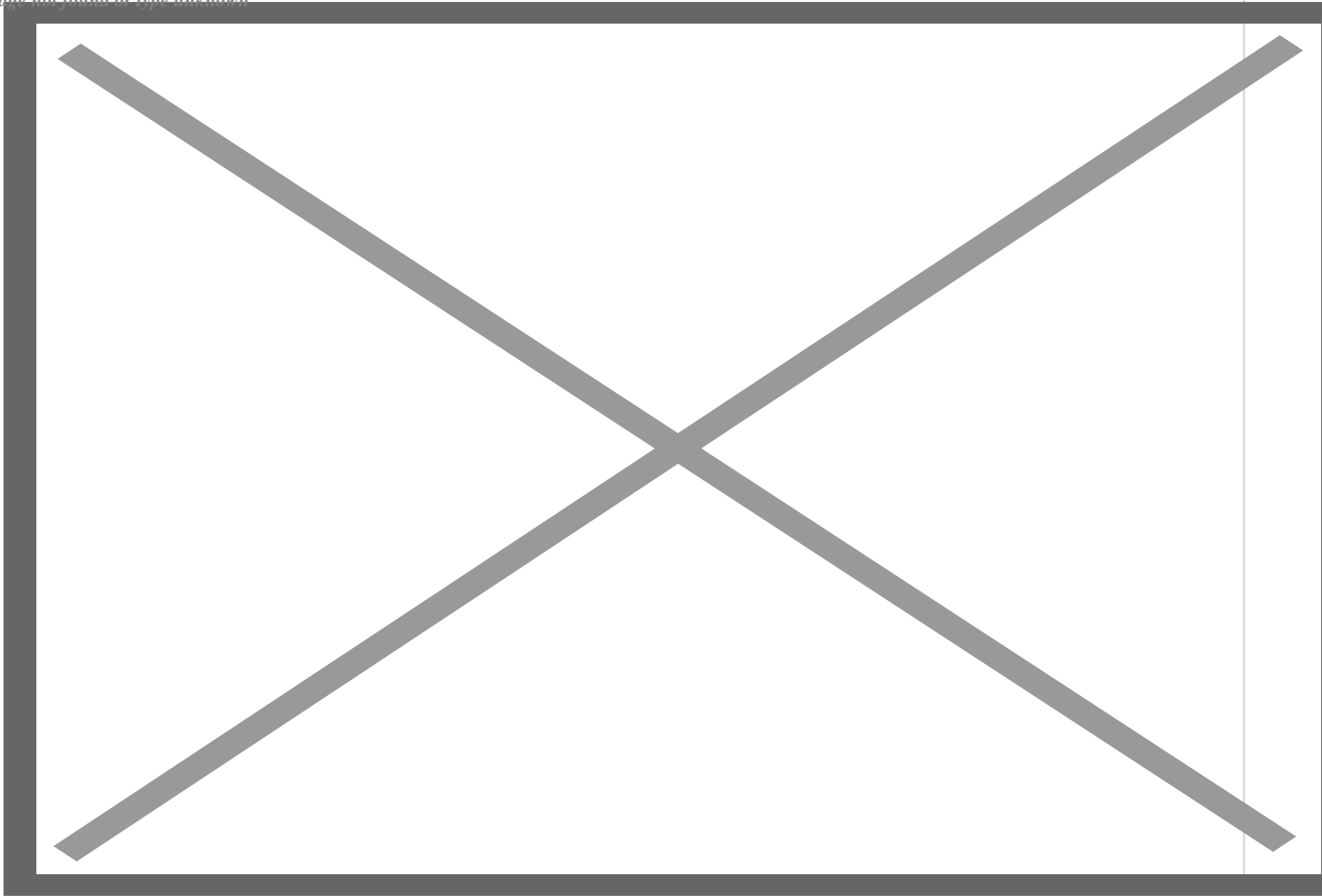


Hundreds of migrants break through Melilla border fence

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The mass crossing is the first since Spain and Morocco resolved a diplomatic spat over Western Sahara.

Madrid, June 24 (RHC)-- Hundreds of migrants have broken through the border separating Spain's Melilla enclave from Morocco, in the first attempted mass crossing since the two nations mended diplomatic ties in March.

"A large group of sub-Saharan [Africans] ... broke through the access gate of the Barrio Chino border checkpoint and entered Melilla by jumping over the roof of the checkpoint," the Spanish government's

delegation in the area said in a statement on Friday.

Melilla and Ceuta, Spain's other tiny North African enclaves, have the European Union's only land borders with Africa, making them a magnet for migrants. Morocco deployed a "large" number of forces to try to repel the crowd from the border and "cooperated actively" with Spain's security forces, the delegation said earlier in a separate statement.

Images on Spanish media showed exhausted migrants laying on the sidewalk in Melilla, some with bloodied hands and torn clothes.

In March this year, Spain ended a yearlong diplomatic crisis by backing Morocco's autonomy plan for Western Sahara, going back on its decades-long stance of neutrality.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez then visited Rabat, and the two governments hailed a "new stage" in relations. The row began when Madrid allowed Brahim Ghali, leader of Western Sahara's pro-independence Polisario Front, to be treated for COVID-19 in a Spanish hospital in April 2021.

A month later, some 10,000 migrants surged across the Moroccan border into Spain's Ceuta enclave as border guards looked the other way, in what was widely seen as a punitive gesture by Rabat.

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