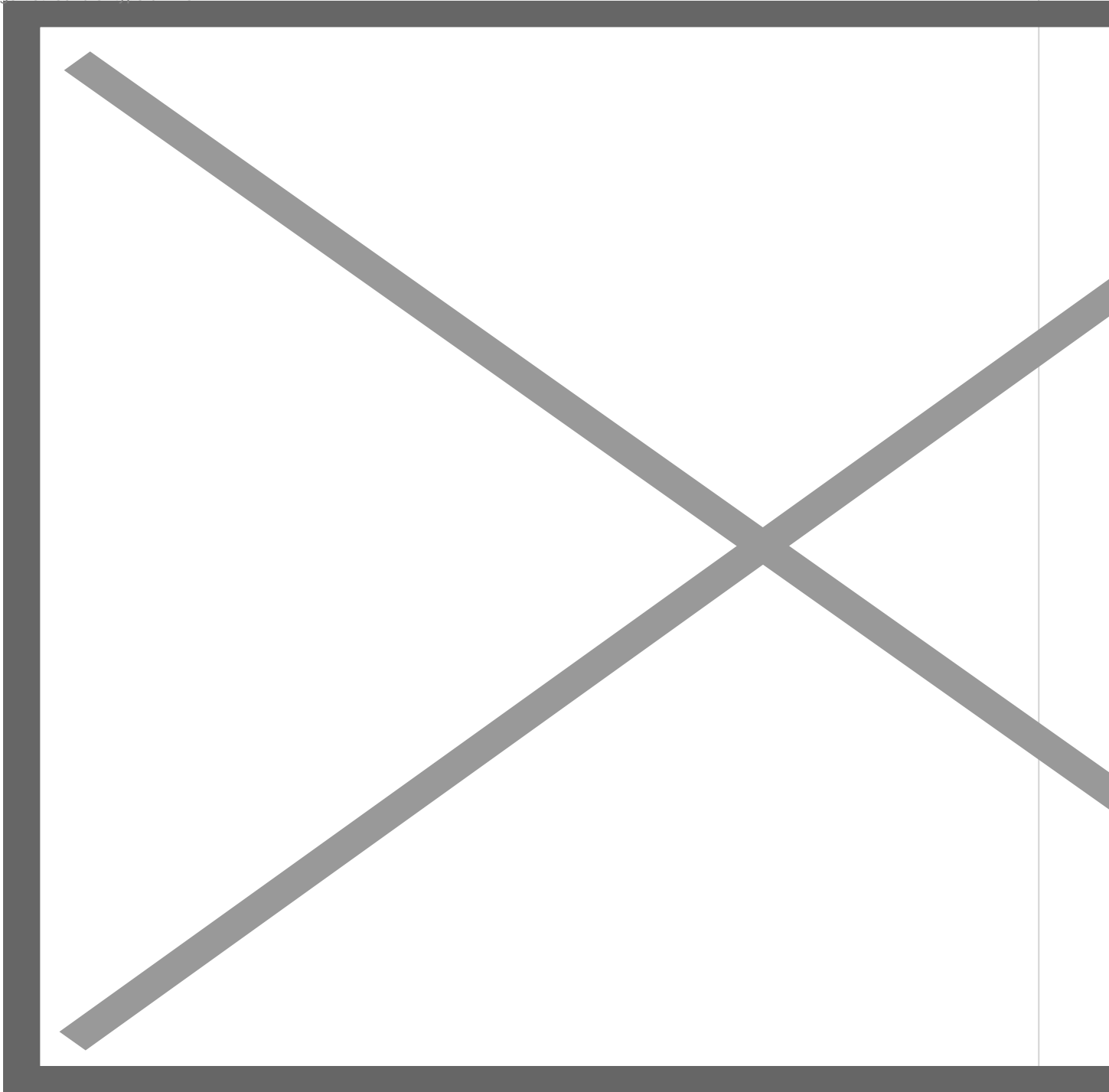


Spain promises full cooperation with migrant death probes

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Migrants climb the fences separating the Spanish enclave of Melilla from Morocco [File: Javier Bernardo/AP Photo]

Madrid, June 29 (RHC)-- Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez has promised his government would offer "total collaboration" with the Spanish and Moroccan investigations into the deaths of 23 migrants during a mass attempt to enter Spain's Melilla enclave.

The remarks came on Wednesday, a day after the United Nations denounced authorities on the border between Morocco and Spain for using “excessive force”, describing it as “unacceptable.”

The deadly incident happened at dawn on Friday, when about 2,000 migrants, mostly from sub-Saharan Africa, tried to break through the fence from Morocco into Melilla. “I regret the loss of human life and express my solidarity with the families of the migrants who died,” Sanchez told Cadena Ser radio, pledging his government would work with investigators to understand what happened.

Sanchez stressed that three investigations had been opened, one by Moroccan prosecutors, one by Spain’s public prosecutor and a third by the Spanish rights ombudsman. “We have to trust these institutions and I pledge the government’s total collaboration with their efforts to clarify what happened,” he said.

Moroccan authorities said some of the victims had fallen while trying to scramble over the fence, giving an initial death toll of 18, but later raising it to 23 after five more migrants died of their injuries.

Few details about the incident were available, but Spanish media showed footage of people on the ground, some with bloodied hands and torn clothes.

The death toll was by far the worst recorded in years of attempts by migrants to cross into Spain’s Ceuta and Melilla enclaves, which have the EU’s only land borders with Africa, making them a magnet for those desperate to escape grinding poverty and hunger.

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