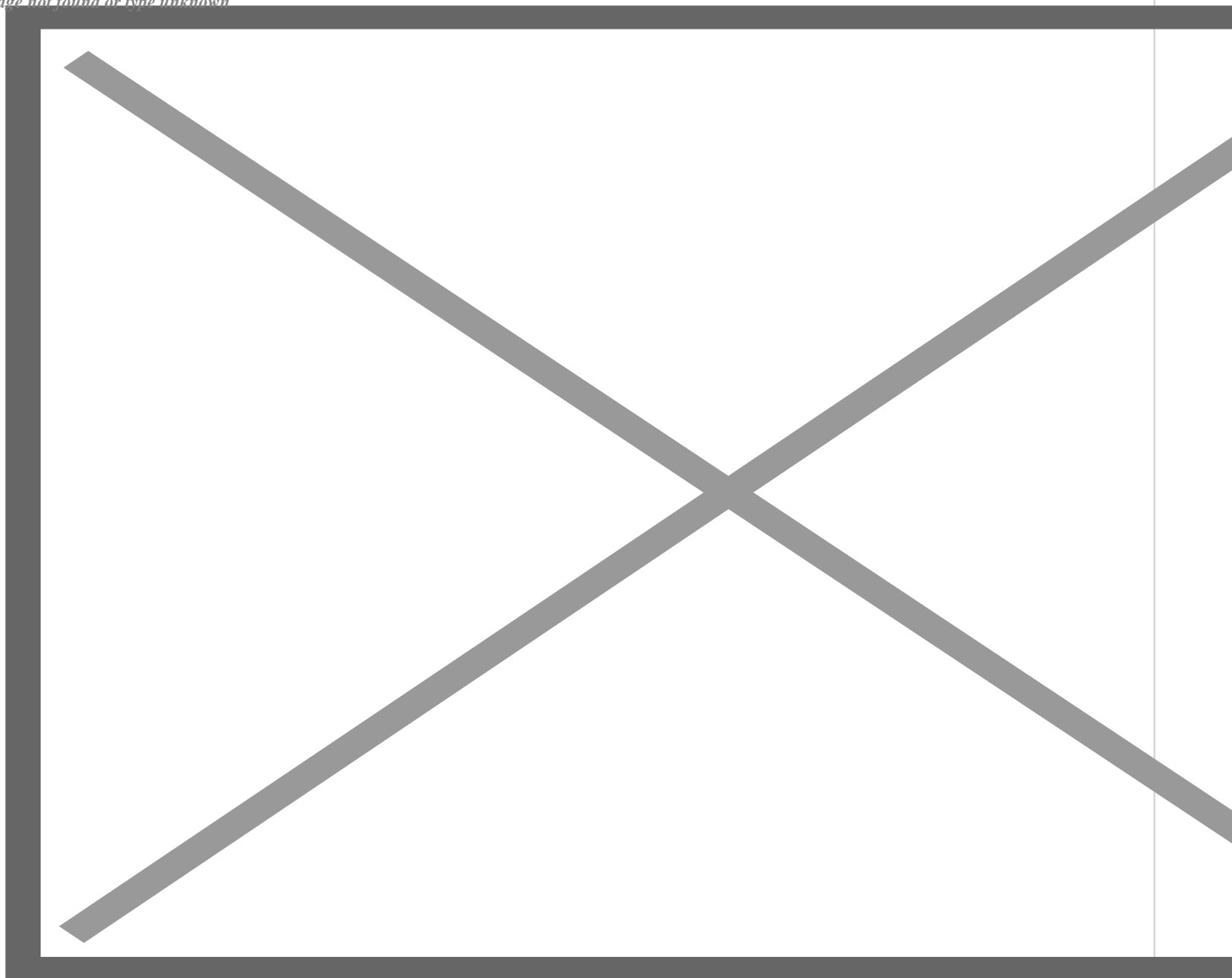


Morocco suspends contact with German embassy

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Morocco's FM Bourita, left, said 'there will be no contact until we have received answers to the various questions we have posed' [Photo: Tobias Schwarz/AFP]

Rabat, March 3 (RHC)-- Morocco has suspended contacts with the German embassy in the North African kingdom in part over what officials said was Berlin's stance on the Western Sahara dispute.

In the letter addressed to the prime minister late on Monday and published by Moroccan media, Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita said the decision to suspend dealings with the embassy as well as German cultural organisations was taken in response to "deep misunderstandings" on "issues fundamental for Morocco."

"Morocco wishes to preserve its relationship with Germany but this is a form of warning expressing unease over many issues," a senior foreign ministry official told AFP news agency. "There will be no contact until we have received answers to the various questions we have posed."

Morocco was angered by German criticism of former U.S. President Donald Trump's recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara in return for moves by Rabat to normalise its relations with Israel, the official said.

It was also dismayed that it was kept out of discussions on Libya's political future at a congress in Berlin in January 2020. The moves showed "disregard" by German authorities, the senior official said.

Morocco has generally had good relations with Germany. Only three months ago, Morocco's foreign minister hailed the "excellence of bilateral cooperation" after Berlin released 1.39 billion euros (\$1.6 billion) in support of Moroccan financial reforms and coronavirus countermeasures.

The Algeria-backed breakaway movement Polisario Front seeks to establish an independent state for Western Sahara, a vast desert region Morocco has held since Spain withdrew in 1975 and which Rabat considers its southern province.

The region has been on the United Nations list of non-self-governing territories, a stance also taken by the African Union, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), and the European Union.

To date, a referendum has not been held its status, with the main sticking points including the formation of electoral lists, especially since there have been attempts on both sides to shift the demographics in the area in a bid to influence the results.

The region is home to some 500,000 people, most of whom live in the capital, Laayoune.

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