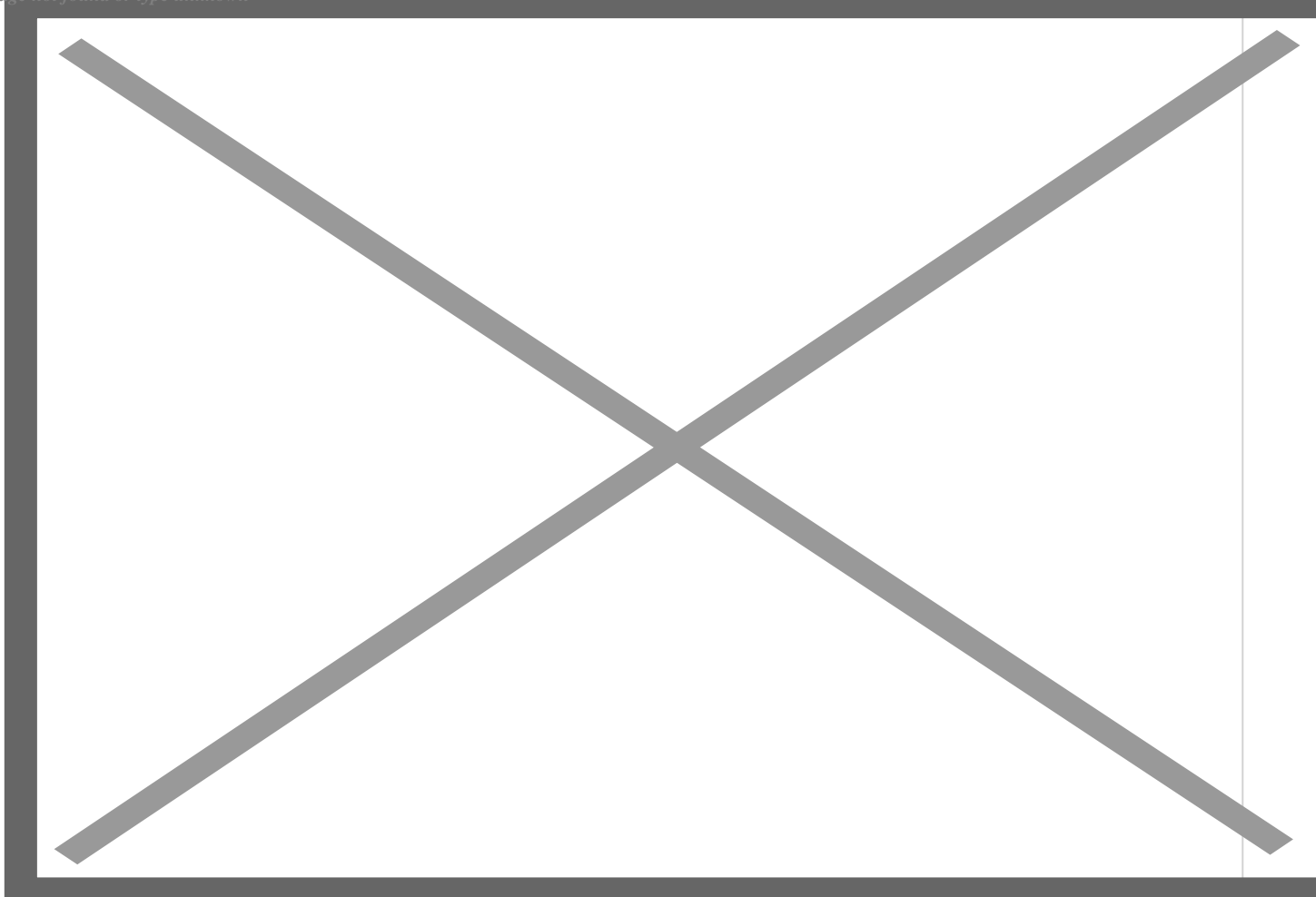


France opens inquiry into cardinal's confession of child abuse

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French Cardinal Jean Pierre Bernard Ricard arrives at a meeting at the Synod Hall in the Vatican Ricard arrives at a meeting at the Synod Hall in the Vatican [File: Alessandro Bianchi/Reuters]

Paris, November 9 (RHC)-- French prosecutors in Marseille said on Tuesday they had opened an inquiry into child abuse by a French cardinal after he confessed publicly to "reprehensible" acts against a 14-

year-old girl in the 1980s.

Jean-Pierre Ricard, a retired bishop who was made a cardinal by Pope Francis in 2016, was named among 11 senior clergymen who face sexual abuse allegations in an announcement by the French Catholic church on Monday.

In a message read out at a conference of bishops, Ricard said: “35 years ago, when I was a priest, I behaved in a reprehensible way towards a girl of 14. There is no doubt that my behaviour caused serious and long-lasting consequences for that person.”

The most serious sexual offences in France such as rape usually have a statute of limitations of 30 years, but the period to bring charges can be extended if the victim was a minor at the time of the offence. The maximum period for charges for sexual abuse of a minor is usually 20 years from the date at which the victim turns 18.

“A preliminary enquiry has been started to verify the facts of this revelation,” prosecutor Dominique Laurens told the AFP news agency in Marseille where Ricard said the abuse took place.

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