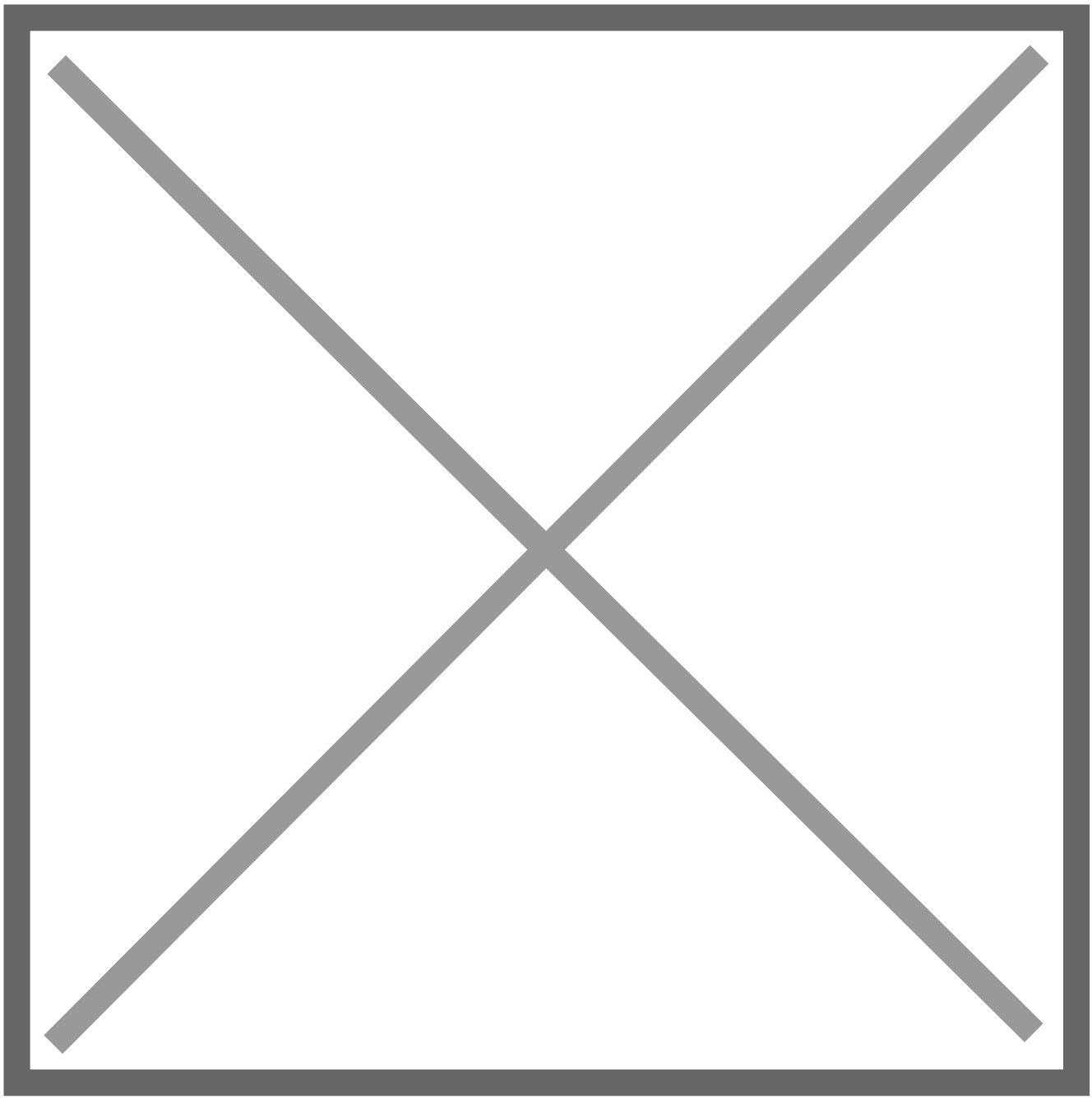
News



Argentine President Alberto Fernández speaks during a news conference with Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez at the Casa Rosada presidential palace in Buenos Aires, Argentina, June 9, 2021. (CNS photo/Agustin Marcarian, Reuters)



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The Argentine bishops' pastoral team for aboriginal peoples rebuked comments from the country's president that perpetuated the viewpoint that the population predominantly arrived "on ships" from Europe.

President Alberto Fernández, appearing June 9 with Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, repeated the line of an old song -- which he erroneously attributed to Mexican writer Octavio Paz -- "Mexicans came from the Indians, Brazilians from the jungle and we Argentines on ships ... from Europe."

The comments provoked strong reactions throughout Latin America, where many people's ancestry are from Indigenous, European or African roots -- and often a mix of these ethnicities. It also revealed opinions on how Argentines often see themselves as the product of mass immigration from Europe -- especially Italy and including Pope Francis' family -- in the early 1900s.

In a statement June 10, the bishops' National Aboriginal Pastoral Team, said, "The imaginary White European as the only model in the Americas provokes a wound

which continues being open. And the reiteration of this ethnocentric model reproduces the mythical idea of a hegemonic Argentina. The reality of an ancestral Argentina, which is Indigenous and multicultural, emerges from the same history."

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For his part, Fernández offered apologies for his remarks, which he said were not meant to offend. But he also offered a further explanation.

"In the first half of the 20th century, we received more than 5 million immigrants, who lived together with our original peoples," he tweeted June 10. "Our diversity is a point of pride."

He wasn't the first Argentine president to speak of the country's population coming across the ocean on ships, according to the National Aboriginal Pastoral Team.

"The unfortunate phrase makes invisible the Original Communities' years of struggle for respect of their identity and the right to their territories, which in recent years have been gaining worldwide recognition," the team's statement said.

The Indigenous population of Argentina numbers 955,032 in 35 ethnic groups, according to the most recent census -- about 2.1% of the country's population of 45.1 million.