News



Relatives of victims of extrajudicial killings show portraits of their loved ones during the "Lord, Heal Our Land" Mass Nov. 5 at the Shrine of Mary Queen of Peace in Manila. (CNS/Dondi Tawatao, Reuters)

by Catholic News Service

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Manila, Philippines — December 5, 2017

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Gunmen killed a 72-year-old Catholic priest on the main Philippine island of Luzon Dec. 4, a day after police killed a pastor they tagged as a member of the communist New People's Army.

Ucanews.com reported that unidentified men shot dead Fr. Marcelito Paez around 8 p.m. while he was driving in San Leonardo, about 110 miles northeast of the capital. The priest died almost three hours later at a local hospital.

The attack occurred hours after Paez, a retired priest of the San Jose Diocese and a national board member of the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines, facilitated the release of a political prisoner in Cabanatuan, the provincial capital.

The Rural Missionaries of the Philippines is a national, intercongregational organization of priests and laypeople that works with peasants and indigenous people. Paez was also the group's Central Luzon coordinator.

San Jose Bishop Roberto Mallari and other clergy condemned the killing and demanded justice. In a statement, Mallari said Paez once headed the justice and peace desk of the diocese's social action commission, bringing him in close contact with poor workers and farmers.

On Dec. 3, the police regional mobile force said they killed the Rev. Lovelito Quinones of the Kings Glory Ministry in Mansalay, almost 500 miles southwest of Manila. Police said they tagged the pastor as a member of the New People's Army.

However, ucanews.com reported the pastor's relatives and critics denied the charge and said police planted a gun after shooting him just five minutes away from his residence. Human rights groups said no gun residue was found on the victim's arm, supporting the idea of a planted gun.

On Nov. 16 in Jabonga, gunmen shot dead United Church of Christ of the Philippines lay pastor Perfecto Hoyle.

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has branded the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army "terrorist" groups. The president also threatened to go after legal activist groups. His spokesman said groups and

individuals suspected of "conspiring" with the underground movement would be included as targets.

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Duterte later told soldiers they can shoot unarmed civilians if they feel threatened. He promised the military legal protection from human rights cases, the same pledge offered to a police force that has killed close to 4,000 suspected drug addicts and dealers.

Paez was known as an activist. A former parish priest, he once led the Central Luzon Alliance for a Sovereign Philippines, which campaigned for the removal of the U.S. military bases in Central Luzon and other parts of the country.

On the day he was killed, Paez had facilitated the release of an organizer of a farmers' group arrested by the army in March.

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The original story can be found at https://www.ucanews.com/news/rage-grief-sweep-philippines-after-murder-of-priest/80983.