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Manila, Philippines — June 6, 2018
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A Catholic priest who once served as chaplain of the Philippine National Police was wounded after a gun attack June 6 in Calamba City, about 25 miles from Manila.

Fr. Rey Urmeneta, 64, a priest at St. Michael the Archangel Parish in the city, was on his way to a church meeting when two gunmen shot him.

A police report obtained by ucanews.com said the priest was in his car with secretary Remedios de Belen when the shooting occurred about 9.40 a.m.

Urmeneta suffered wounds to his left upper back and left arm. He was rushed to a hospital, where he was reported to be in stable condition.

An investigation was continuing to determine the motive for the attack, although the priest has already told police that the incident may have something to do with people who owed him money.

In April, Fr. Mark Ventura of Gattaran in northern Philippines died after being shot by a lone gunman after celebrating Sunday Mass.

On Dec. 4, Fr. Marcelito Paez was also shot and killed in the town of Jaen, about 70 miles north of Manilla.

Faith-based social development network Philippine Misereor Partnership Inc. has lamented the deaths of the priests who were known to be human rights defenders.

Yoly Esguerra, the partnership's coordinator, described the killing of Ventura as "senseless."

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"To kill a priest who has chosen to live a life with simple people in distant and forgotten places to make up for the lack of government presence in the area is preposterous," Esguerra said in a statement.

Paez, meanwhile, was shot after visiting a jail to help free a political prisoner.

Philippine human rights groups said the killings of the priests and the attacks on human rights defenders in the country have become "a source of our deep concern."

"We can't help but ask, is this the way to silence critical voices of a sector that can potentially challenge and oppose the rules and policies of those in power?" read a PMPI statement released in May.

The group said the church, "despite many internal odds and challenges," has been a "consistent moral compass" for past leaders and governments.

Global Witness, a London-based human rights organization, said the Philippines was the second deadliest country for activists in 2017.