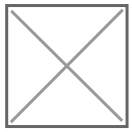
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QUITO, ECUADOR — November 7, 2024
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Four days after 53-year-old Father Enrique Fabián Arcos went missing in Ecuador, the authorities found his body Nov. 3 in a dump about 18 miles north of Ambato, where he lived.

The murder was preceded by a robbery in Arcos' house. Closed-circuit TV footage of the area showed that the priest was accompanied by three other men that day. The police confirmed Nov. 5 that they have fully identified the perpetrators.

Arcos poses for picture next to other pries; both wear white chasubles.

Four days after 53-year-old Father Enrique Fabián Arcos, left, went missing in Ecuador, the authorities found his body Nov. 3, 2024, in a dump about 18 miles north of Ambato, where he lived. He was a much beloved pastor of the migrant community of San Roque of Huachi Chico, where numerous Venezuelans receive help, especially food kits. He probably met one of the perpetrators there. (OSV

News/courtesy Facebook profile of the priest)

According to reports from the local press, the perpetrators got into the house of the priest without forcing the doors. They tied up his 93-year-old mother, Rebeca Sevilla, and took some of her belongings, including jewelry.

After that, they tried to take money from the priest's bank accounts, police said, and when they failed to do so, they decided to kill Arcos and left the house with him. His mother managed to free herself and shortly thereafter asked for help.

Arcos' body was found in a disturbing condition, partially eaten by dogs and rodents — something that required additional forensic efforts, prompting the authorities to send it to Ecuador's capital city, Quito. His car was found in a different location, burned to ashes.

One of the key elements in the police investigation is that one of the men seen that day with the priest was a foreigner whom Arcos allegedly knew.

According to Father Fabricio Dávila, the Diocese of Ambato's spokesperson, "foreigner" is used as an euphemism for Venezuelan in Ecuador, given the vast community of immigrants and refugees in the Andean country formed by people who left Venezuela over the past few years.

"Our Venezuelan brothers and sisters live many times in very difficult conditions and already face terrible xenophobia," he told OSV News.

Arcos used to work regularly in the parish of San Roque of Huachi Chico, where numerous Venezuelans receive help, especially food kits. He probably met one of the perpetrators there.

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"Father Arcos faced a neurological problem years ago and had problems walking and moving his right arm. That's why he was not a vicar (in charge of a parish). But he devoted himself to the community in San Roque and to Indigenous people," Dávila said. He said Arcos spoke Kichwa, an Indigenous Quechuan language in Ecuador, and thus had great closeness to the native groups he assisted.

Dávila said that Arcos was always seen as a "highly virtuous man of faith, one who was very loving with people and very joyful."

"He lived in great austerity. At the same time, he was tremendously generous," he described.

The priests' mother, and witness of his kidnapping, is a well-known Catholic leader in the community, Dávila said. He and the local bishop were the ones to give her the news on her son's death, which she received "with profound sadness and distress."

"We only hope that the investigators clarify all facts and discover what happened. And that the perpetrators are judged according to Ecuador's laws," Dávila said.

In his opinion, Arcos died because of the unjust exploitation of his "most beautiful virtue" — generosity.

"His kindness and solidarity made him trust in those people," he concluded.

Ecuador has been facing an unprecedented violence crisis over the past years, with drug cartels and armed bands, with the homicide rate in the South American country reaching 47.2 murders per 100,000 people in 2023.