



# PHILIPPINES

The killing of 22 Sunday Massgoers and the maiming of more than 100 others in Jolo’s Catholic cathedral in January 2019 removed all doubt about the continuing threat posed by Islamist militants. Fear was still high following on from the siege of Marawi by Islamist extremists, who were finally defeated in October 2017 after a five-month siege. Much of Marawi City was damaged including the Catholic cathedral. Vicar General Father Teresito Suganob and 15 other Christians were kidnapped.<sup>1</sup> Over that time, more than 1,000 people died and 400,000 were displaced.

President Rodrigo Duterte has been antagonistic to the Catholic Church throughout his time in office, calling Catholic clergy “sons of bitches” for criticizing his shoot-to-kill drugs policy. Various Catholic organizations have been targeted by government agencies. The Catholic Media Network radio broadcaster had its licence renewal blocked in Congress.<sup>2</sup> A number of priests have been shot by unknown assailants. Such attacks may have been provoked by opposition to their activism in upholding the Church’s social teaching. For example, Father Marcelito Paez was killed after helping to get a political prisoner released.<sup>3</sup>

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2. “Philippines,” *Religious Freedom in the World*, 2018 report, <https://religious-freedom-report.org/report/?report=772>; “Church vs Duterte: Lawmakers told to renew licence for Catholic radio stations,” *Asian Correspondent*, February 2018, <https://asiancorrespondent.com/2018/02/church-vs-duterte-lawmakers-told-renew-licence-catholic-radio-stations/> (accessed June 14, 2019).
3. Mark Saludes, “Philippine diocese bids to seek justice for slain priest,” *UCANews*, April 13, 2018, <https://www.ucanews.com/news/philippine-diocese-bids-to-seek-justice-for-slain-priest/82037> (accessed June 14, 2019).
4. “Australian nun released after arrest in Philippines for ‘illegal political activities,’” *Guardian*, April 17, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/17/australian-nun-arrested-in-philippines-for-illegal-political-activities>; Joe Torres, “Philippine religious leaders claim government moves to silence Church,” *UCANews*, April 26, 2018, <https://www.ucanews.com/news/philippine-religious-leaders-claim-govt-moves-to-silence-church/82158> (Both sites accessed June 14, 2019). She won a reprieve in late June 2018: Jose Torres, “Nun’s missionary visa restored,” *Catholic Times*, June 22, 2018, p. 1.
5. “Catholic priest shot dead in Philippines,” *SBS*, June 11, 2018, <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/catholic-priest-shot-dead-in-philippines> (accessed June 14, 2019).
6. The government gives a lower official figure of 4,999. Ted Regencia “Philippines’ Duterte: ‘Kill those useless bishops,’” *Al Jazeera*, December 5, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/12/philippines-duterte-kill-useless-catholic-bishops-181205132220894.html> (accessed July 1, 2019).
7. “Cathedral Bombing Appears to Make Terrorist Statement after Referendum in Philippines,” *Morning Star News*, February 4, 2019, <https://morningstarnews.org/2019/02/cathedral-bombing-appears-to-make-terrorist-statement-after-referendum-in-philippines/>; John Newton, “Filipino Church calls for prayer and solidarity following bomb attack,” *Aid to the Church in Need (UK) News*, January 28, 2019, <https://acnuk.org/news/filipino-church-calls-for-prayer-and-solidarity-following-bomb-attack/> (accessed June 14, 2019).

## APRIL 2018

71-year-old Sister Patricia Fox was arrested and detained by the Immigration Bureau. The Australian nun, who had worked in the country for 27 years, was arrested for “illegal political activities.” Although released the next day, she was ordered to leave the country within 30 days. Redemptorist Priest Oliver Castor saw the move as the government trying to “stop the Church’s work with the poor.”<sup>4</sup>

## JUNE 2018

Father Richmond Nilo was shot dead as he was preparing to say evening Mass in Zaragoza, Nueva Ecija Province on Sunday the 10<sup>th</sup>. Two unidentified gunmen shot at the priest through a window. He was the third priest to be killed in six months.<sup>5</sup>

## DECEMBER 2018

President Rodrigo Duterte verbally attacked Catholic bishops saying: “These bishops that you guys have, kill them. They are useless fools. All they do is criticize.” The remarks followed further Church opposition to the president’s war on drugs in which more than 20,000 have been killed since its launch in 2016.<sup>6</sup>

## JANUARY 2019

Two bombs exploded during Sunday Mass in the Cathedral of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Jolo on January 27<sup>th</sup>, killing at least 22 people and wounding more than 100 others. Responsibility was claimed by Daesh (ISIS)-affiliated Islamist group Abu Sayyaf. They had been excluded from negotiations with the government which had led to the previous week’s referendum, which created the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.<sup>7</sup>