

Philippines: Missionaries escape Basilan ambush



Government militiamen secure the missionaries during the firefight on Sunday.

Two Claretian missionary priests, a deacon and a theology student narrowly escaped an attempted ambush by suspected Abu Sayyaf militants in Basilan province Sunday.

The incident occurred four days after the al-Qaeda-linked terror group were thought to have killed eight people and wounded 22 others in an attack on plantation workers on the same road near the village of Tumahubong.

Bishop Martin Jumoad of Isabela today confirmed that Fathers Elmer Cantular and Julius Boado were unharmed following the attack.

“We escaped an ambush [yesterday]. It’s good that nobody was killed or hurt,” said the theology student, John Luis Guades, in a text message to ucanews.com Sunday.

The priests were heading to Isabela town with their security escorts when gunmen attacked a group of government militia who were guarding the road where the priests were supposed to pass.

Luckily, the priests’ vehicle had been slightly delayed and avoided the initial attack because one of them had to bless the remains of one of the victims of last week’s ambush, Bishop Jumoad said.

“The priests were immediately taken to Tumahubong,” he said. “They are safe and remain there now,”

the bishop said.

Jumoad said he will visit the priests tomorrow “to show our moral support.”

It was unclear whether the priests were the target of the gunmen.

The Claretians had issued a statement on Friday and challenged the government and the Catholic Church to do something about the ongoing violence in the province.

Louis Guades, cmf - UCA News