

Papal nuncio's 2003 death in Burundi attributed to random violence

DUBLIN, Ireland - The identity of the killers of Archbishop Michael Courtney, the Vatican diplomat shot dead in Burundi in 2003, probably never will be known, the prelate's brother said.

Louis Courtney, the archbishop's brother and a coroner, conducted an inquest May 13 into the death of the papal nuncio to the East African nation. He announced the finding after the inquest in Nenagh, in County Tipperary.

Courtney said he believed his 58-year-old brother was shot Dec. 29, 2003, in a random act and was not targeted because he was a senior Catholic Church figure.

The inquest heard that assailants had ambushed the car in which Archbishop Courtney was traveling because they were looking for food, clothing or other supplies.

Courtney said other cars had been ambushed on the same route on the day of the fatal shooting, but his brother was the only one killed in the attacks.

Archbishop Courtney was involved in furthering Burundi's peace process in the midst of the country's civil war. Both the government and the rebel National Liberation Forces accused each other of the murder.

In 2006 a Burundian investigative journalist reported that the archbishop's death had been planned from the top levels of the Burundian government, a charge officials denied.