

Priest cleared of links to ivory trade

Philippines investigators say insufficient evidence found

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Investigators in the Philippines have cleared a Catholic priest in the Archdiocese of Cebu of involvement in the illegal trade of ivory.

The National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) said it found "no sufficient evidence" to link Monsignor Cristobal Garcia to the illegal trade.

The NBI also cleared the priest of allegations that he owns religious icons made from banned ivory.

In its October 2012 issue, National Geographic magazine linked Garcia, who is also facing child abuse charges in the United States, to the illegal ivory trade.

The National Geographic article quoted Garcia explaining how ivory can be smuggled out of the Philippines.

Philippine investigators, however, said they found insufficient evidence to pin down the priest, who has reportedly been hiding in Manila over the past year.

"We really could not establish that Monsignor Garcia is engaged in [ivory] smuggling... the accusations remain hearsay," said Gregorio Algosos Jr, NBI supervising agent in Cebu City.

Authorities found some 5,000 religious icons in the priest's residence in Cebu, but Algosos said only three "appeared to be made of ivory".

Garcia was a Dominican priest in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles in the 1980s when he was accused of child abuse.

The Dominican expelled the priest after a nun reported to the police that an altar boy had been found in the priest's bed in a Los Angeles rectory.

The Los Angeles Times reported that Garcia was accused of molesting two youths in 1980 and 1984.