

LETTER TO THE SULTAN OF BRUNEI

Francisco de Sande (1540–1627), Governor of the Philippines (1575–1580)

to Saiful Rijal, Sultan of Brunei (1533–1581)

A native of Extremadura, Francisco de Sande served as judge and auditor in Mexico before arriving to serve as the third Spanish Governor of the Philippines. During his first few years in the Philippines, he reformed the encomienda system, reduced the power of the wealthy landowners, and introduced the Augustinian and Dominican orders to the islands.

Brunei, a kingdom on the island of Borneo, had dominated the entire archipelago for centuries prior to Spanish arrival. For decades the ruler of Brunei, Saiful Rijal, launched raids on the Spanish colonists, sent missionaries to proselytize Spain's indigenous subjects, kidnapped merchants from across the region, and committed other outrages against the Spanish settlements. In response, de Sande sent this letter of warning to Rijal.

13 April 1578

I, Doctor Francisco de Sande, Governor and Captain-General for His Majesty in these islands and districts of the west, by order of His Majesty, the King of Castile and Leon, my sovereign, Don Felipe, the greatest king and most powerful sovereign in the world, send this letter by these messengers to you, Sultan Rijal, King of Borneo, so that you may know my will and what I require.

You know already how I, with the other captains and soldiers of the Castilians live, by order of the King, our sovereign, in Manila, in the island of Luzon, in Cebu, and in other districts. There in Manila, Cebu, and other districts it has been rumored that you have tried and are trying to do us harm, and to make war upon us; that you have tried to induce and have solicited the natives of Luzon and other districts to rebel and revolt against us; that you have sent spies to Cebu and other districts; that you have left your residence for this purpose of warring against us with a fleet of ships.

All these things are without any reason, and I know not what is the cause therefor; for my will is good and I desire to show naught but good to all and ill to none. Since I am proceeding to confer with you openly and publicly, I notify you that I am not coming to plunder or to harm you, but to prove of use to you; for the King, my sovereign, orders thus, and accordingly I gladly notify you that I am going to you.

My sovereign, the King of Castile, spends his money through us, the Castilians and sends us into all parts of the world in order that we might proclaim the law of the true God.

For this purpose I came hither; and now I am going to confer with you, chiefly that you may know your God and Creator, and to teach you the true law. I wish to do you no ill, nor to seize your possessions; on the contrary, if you are our friend, I will aid and defend you, according to the orders of the King, my sovereign. To this end I offer you peace and friendship on our part, in such wise that there may be mutual security on both sides to go and to come, to see one another, to trade and traffic, as is usual among friends.

What you are to do is to admit preachers of the Holy Gospel, who may preach the law of the Christians in your lands in all security. And likewise that any person whatever of your country may have entire liberty and permission to attend the preaching of the law of the Christians, and that he who wishes to become a Christian may do so without any ill befalling him.

Further, I desire that you shall send no preachers of the sect of Mohammed to any part of these islands, nor to the heathen among the hill-people, nor into other parts of your own island—inasmuch as the doctrine of Mohammed is a false and evil law, and the religion of the Christians alone is true, holy, and good.

Further, I desire that you send me a Christian Spaniard called Diego Felipe, whom I am told you have there, as well as others if you have them; and two Viscayans, natives of Cebu, Christians whom we know that you have and who were captured from their own country; likewise whomever else you have in your power.

You must give to the heirs of Rajah Suleiman and Lakan Dula—natives of Luzon, vassals of the King, my sovereign, and his subjects, in his royal name—the slaves and property that you have retained there belonging to them; and whatever belongs to any other vassals of the King, my sovereign. This I would do myself if I had anything of yours or of your people, and would pay and return it, and would do justice to them in that regard very openly.

You must allow those persons whom you have detained because they are rich to go about freely, and give them leave to return to their own lands, since they are natives of these islands of the King, my sovereign. They went to trade with you and you have no right to constrain them, but you must allow them to go freely with their wives, children, and possessions. Likewise, you must forbid your people from asking tribute in these islands, inasmuch as I collect tribute in them, as it is the right of our King, my sovereign.

I write this letter that you may be advised of my wishes. You must answer it immediately, and not detain the messengers, even if they should say that they wish to remain in Borneo with you. For if they are detained, I shall understand that there is some mischief and deceit on your part against our people.

As we are coming by way of the sea and have need of food, you must send food to us, in accordance with what is asked by my messengers, in return for our money. This shall be paid you as you wish; and for the same, we are bringing silver and gold.

I shall be glad to receive your reply and to talk with you. Advise me with all haste. May God grant you the true light and health.