

Letter from Brother D. Kok

by
Dirk Kok

translated by
David Mead

2020

**Sulang Language Data and Working Papers:
Translations from the Dutch, no. 25**



Sulawesi Language Alliance
<http://sulang.org/>

LANGUAGES

Subject language : Tolaki
Language of materials : English

DESCRIPTION

The missionary Dirk Kok and his wife arrived in Southeast Celebes in early 1920 and initially stayed with the Hendrik van der Klift family in Mowewe. In this letter he describes some of the resistance he encountered attempting to transition his family to the village of Sanggona on the upper course of the Konawe River.

SOURCE

Kok, D. 1921. Brief van Br. D. Kok. *Orgaan der Nederlandsche Zendingsvereeniging* 61:27–30. Original pagination is indicated by including the page number in square brackets, e.g. [p. 27].

VERSION HISTORY

Version 1 [02 October 2020] Translated March and August 2020, prepared for online publication October 2020.

© 2020 by David Mead
All Rights Reserved

Letter from Brother D. Kok

On the sixteenth of September, Brother V. D. KLIFT and I mounted the horses. The purpose of the trip was again Sanggona. Now my work would begin. When the people of Sanggona and surrounding places went to fetch the wood, our house would soon be standing. In order to encourage people to do so, and to say once again how long and how wide the planks and beams had to be, Br. V. D. KLIFT also went.

Before we were even out of the village of Mowewe, it started raining as if the water was being thrown from the sky in buckets. We stayed a little dry anyway. Br. V. D. KLIFT had a Chinese umbrella above him and I covered myself with a piece of canvas. When we were past the first ridge, the skies cleared and we had a wonderful day again.

The next day we reached Sanggona and with us of course the porters. We moved into the pasanggrahan¹ and I settled in for a few days.

The kapala² was never among those who came. We waited patiently for a few days. Finally we found him in the house of POMBILI, the former head, who, as I wrote you, had previously been removed and sent to Java as a forced laborer because he had had another man killed.

There he was sitting next to a simple oil lamp. We [p. 28] talked about this, that and the other thing, until finally the building of our house came up. It was agreed that in the morning the kapalas and others who had a say in the matter would come to the pasanggrahan to discuss the issue.

Thus the kapala of Sanggona, the kapala of Mokowu, POMBILI, and others turned up.

We offered tobacco and cigarette paper, and soon we were each having a smoke.

And then came the objections, that is, against building our house. They had to harvest rattan and couldn't delay, because they had to hold to their contract with a Chinese.

That's nothing, was our answer; the little wood that we need can be gotten quickly, so that the search for rattan doesn't have to come to a standstill.

Yes, but then came the next objection, we also have to make sure that the roads are in good maintenance, our yards are clean, and therefore, really, we can't get wood.

¹ [translator's note: From Javanese, meaning a guest house or hostel for travelling officials.]

² [translator's note: From Malay *kěpala* 'head,' meaning the head of the village.]

Come, come, we spoke again, the village here is the nicest place in the entire Mekongga country, the roads are beautiful, the surrounding houses are sturdy, and the yards are clean, and if the lieutenant governor³ still has something to say about it, he wouldn't blame you, because he knows you were so busy getting wood for us.

Yes, but yet again there followed, the people don't want to. We kapalas would like to assist in getting the wood delivered; but what do we do when the people prefer to get rattan for the Chinese merchant than wood for you?

Listen, kapala, so we said, you can't be serious. It's customary for the people to follow the command of their kapala. People don't have the option of 'not wanting to'; if the kapala desires it, then the people do so, and conversely: if the kapala is unwilling, then the people will not either.

On this they had to answer guilty as charged, and the end of the matter was that the kapala would return the next day with people under him.

The day was already hastening past sunset when the kapala showed up with his people. A lamp was lit, and the group, which was sitting in front of us, could be surveyed. Apart from the kapala, we counted eleven people.

A meager troop, thus the rest had stayed home. It gave us the particular impression that not many people were available.

So once again the topic of 'house building' came up for discussion. The [p. 29] objections were heard and refuted and we pressed on the hearts of the people that they could be punished if they didn't follow the order of their head.

One of them had a pain in his legs. It was hard for him to walk, let alone chop wood in the forest.

Of course, we replied, people who are sick do not need to get wood, and, somewhat stiffly, the man with the pain in his legs staggered down the stairs and disappeared into the darkness.

That went well, the others thought, and another one pleaded sick and disappeared. A third one also ventured, but now his name was written down. As a result, the others were afraid to report sick. You can never know what a missionary like that does with your name.

Soon we were sitting alone again and we could observe here the same old refrain. Like elsewhere, they reject everything new and foreign. They don't want us here because, they correctly perceive, if the missionary comes to live here, his presence will already

³ [translator's note: Dutch *gezaghebber*, the chief administrator of an *onderafdeeling*, here the Onderafdeeling Kolaka.]

exert influence; and since they want to hold onto their old ways, no wood must be fetched and thus the missionary kept away.

The next day Br. V. D. KLIFT returned home and I was left alone.

So I stayed there alone, waiting for the wood to be delivered. But neither planks or poles ever came. So I waited a few days. Then I had the kapala called and I told him I was going to Mowewe to get money for the wood and return in a few days. That was September 25th, and on September 28th I went back to Sanggona. The kapala assured me once again that the people did not want to get wood, so that no planks had been brought. Moving his hand across his throat, he said, even if they cut my head off, there's nothing I can do about it.

So I stayed at Sanggona until 4 October. Still nothing had been brought. Once again I had the kapalas of Sanggona and Mokowu come, and I informed them that I was returning. I showed myself to be very annoyed, and said I was going to seek out the mokole.⁴

Arriving in Tawanga, I visited the mokole, and asked if I could spend the night at his house, which he immediately allowed. He, too, was disturbed because his order had not been followed. The lieutenant governor had ordered him to ensure that the people of Sanggona and surrounding places obtained wood for the missionary. The lieutenant governor had done this on his own, [p. 30] and threatened punishment if they did not follow his order. Br. VAN DER KLIFT had only asked the lieutenant governor to grant him a permit to obtain wood, which to him implied an order.

So the mokole was upset, and he let his annoyance run loose on the people from Sanggona who had carried my things.

We talked for a while longer, then I slept that night in the mokole's house.

At 6:30 the next morning I made ready and was about to set off when the kapalas from Sanggona and Mokowu arrived. I greeted the mokole and wanted to go, but I was asked to wait a little longer. They wanted to talk a little more.

Now came the real reason why they didn't want to haul wood. They told me that they were afraid of becoming Christians when I came to live in Sanggona.

I replied to them that they remained completely free in this matter; whoever doesn't want to be a Christian, isn't required to become one. No one could force them to do so, not even the lieutenant governor and even less so me.

⁴ [translator's note: The local (Tolaki) word for ruler.]

They asked if they could get this in writing. Yes, that could be done. I promised to be back within a few days with a letter, which stated in Dutch and in their language that they could never be forced to become Christians. Thereupon they promised to get wood.

But now what happened?

I had to go to Kolaka, and met there with the lieutenant governor. He told me that the kapalas from Sanggona and Mokowu had come and told him they could not get wood for the missionary, because they had to prepare their gardens. But here they had miscalculated. The lieutenant governor told them that, yes, they had to tend to their gardens now, but they had already had a few months to get wood (for which they would have received payment) and, having not done so, they had not followed his order, and he was therefore going to punish them.

When I told Br. V. D. KLIFT about that, when he had to go to Kolaka he sought out the lieutenant governor and asked whether the punishment could be waived if the kapalas promised to ensure that wood would come.

The lieutenant governor agreed to this idea, and the kapalas promised to get wood.

So that is the state of affairs up to the present.

I hope to be able to share in a following letter how things have progressed from here.

MOWEWE, 17 November 1920