What is a Government-in-Exile?

Understanding the legal and historical concept of a government-in-exile

Definition

A government-in-exile (GIE) is a political group that claims to be the legitimate government of a country or territory but is unable to exercise power domestically, typically due to foreign occupation, illegal annexation, or the suppression of a people's right to self-determination. Governments-in-exile operate from abroad and seek to represent their people on the international stage.

Recognised in International Law

Governments-in-exile have a long and established history in international law. During World War II, the governments of Poland, France, Norway, the Netherlands, and others operated from London. More recently, the Tibetan Government-in-Exile and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic have exercised similar functions. International law does not prohibit the formation of a government-in-exile and many have been formally recognised by foreign states.

The RSNB-GIE's Legal Basis

The RSNB-GIE derives its legitimacy from the unresolved legal status of Sabah, the void nature of the Malaysia Agreement 1963, and the fundamental right of the Sabahan people to self-determination under the UN Charter, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and customary international law. We are not a rebel group or insurgency — we are a lawful political organisation advocating for legal remedies.

What We Can Do

As a government-in-exile, the RSNB-GIE can: engage with UN bodies and special procedures; maintain diplomatic contacts; file submissions with international courts and human rights mechanisms; represent Sabahans in international forums; and coordinate the global diaspora in a unified, structured advocacy effort.

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