Ligitan & Sipadan — ICJ Case 2002

> *The International Court of Justice ruling and its implications for Sabah*

The Dispute

The islands of Ligitan and Sipadan, located off the northeastern coast of Sabah, were the subject of a sovereignty dispute between Malaysia and Indonesia that was adjudicated by the International Court of Justice. The ICJ issued its judgment in December 2002, awarding the islands to Malaysia.

Implications for Sabah

While the case was between Malaysia and Indonesia, its proceedings touched on the historical legal framework governing North Borneo's territorial status. The Court's analysis of historical treaties and effective administration in the region provides important precedents and legal arguments relevant to the broader question of Sabah's sovereignty.

The Philippine Claim

The Philippines, which maintains a claim to Sabah as the successor to the Sultanate of Sulu, intervened in the ICJ proceedings. The continued existence of the Philippine claim is itself evidence that the question of North Borneo's sovereignty has never been fully settled in international law — a fact that the RSNB-GIE relies upon in its legal arguments.

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