

## PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM HIGAONNA SENSEI

Greetings. It is a new year, 2023, and this year promises to be a good and successful year for us. I hope that this finds you all well. I myself am in good health and good spirits, training every day, and looking forward to the future, both personally and for the TOGKF.

By now I'm sure you all know that I resigned from the IOGKF and established a new organization, the TOGKF. Until now, I have remained silent about the reasons for my decision to resign from the IOGKF and to sever all ties with its current management. I initially thought it would be best to move forward with my new organization, and that the reasons for my decision would become clear to everyone over time.

Unfortunately, rumors and misinformation about me and the reasons for my decision continue to circulate. Much information has been published that is inaccurate and incomplete and which gives a misleading impression about the reasons for my decision to resign from the IOGKF and establish the TOGKF. Because of this, and in order to rectify any confusion for people as to the true nature of what actually happened, I feel it is time to set the record straight, and I will do so here.

First let me be clear: **I resigned from the IOGKF; I did not retire.**

I continue, as I always have, to teach, promote and make accessible to all, Traditional Okinawan Goju-Ryu as it was taught to me. This was my mission before the IOGKF was established and it remains my life-long vision and mission now.

I established the IOGKF in 1979 for the purpose of assisting me in my vision and mission. I resigned from the IOGKF in September of 2022 and established the TOGKF because I discovered that the individuals I had trusted to support me in managing the day-to-day affairs of the organization had developed a different vision and had taken administrative steps, without my knowledge or informed consent, to remove my voice in the overall direction and management of the IOGKF.

I met with these individuals to try and resolve the issues that had caused them to act contrary to my wishes and direction, but they were adamant that they now controlled the IOGKF, and that my voice was no longer relevant. They did not treat me or my vision and mission with respect. I therefore had no choice but to reassert my voice and form a new organization, the TOGKF, to support me in pursuing the vision and mission that I have always championed.

To correct some of the inaccurate, incomplete and misleading information that has been published and circulated about me and my reasons for resigning from the IOGKF and establishing the TOGKF, I state as follows:

In 2012, I made the decision to appoint Tetsuji Nakamura as the IOGKF Chief Instructor. He had been the IOGKF administrator for the previous 6 years and I believed I could trust him to support me in my vision and mission. To create a system of checks and balances, I also appointed Ernie Molyneux and Henrik Larsen as Executive Committee members. It was my intention to delegate much of the traveling and the day-to-day running of the IOGKF to these three so that I could concentrate on preserving Okinawan Goju-Ryu karate for posterity, in particular, working to have it recognized by UNESCO. **I did not appoint Mr. Nakamura as my replacement and I never relinquished any of my authority as the overall head of the IOGKF.**

In June of 2022, I discovered that my trust in Mr. Nakamura had been misplaced. It became clear to me that during the past decade Mr. Nakamura and the EC members had been pursuing a separate agenda and had not been transparent with me, as the overall head of the IOGKF, about IOGKF decisions and finances.

I discovered that in 2012, as soon as I had appointed Mr. Nakamura and the EC members to their positions, they had drawn up a document titled the 'IOGKF Constitution', written entirely in English. They told me this document was basically the rules and by-laws that I had developed, only adding their names and positions. I did not seek independent advice since I trusted what they told me and had no reason to disbelieve them. They never explained that their interpretation of the document was that the new IOGKF Constitution stripped me of all decision-making authority concerning the IOGKF. Had I understood the full implications of this wording in 2012, I would never have agreed that Mr. Nakamura, Mr. Molyneux and Mr. Larsen should be involved in managing the IOGKF.

Recently, I also became aware of the fact that over the years Mr. Nakamura had methodically transferred all of my copyrights and trademarks out of my name and registered them into the name of the IOGKF, a corporation he created without including my name. He appointed himself as the head of the IOGKF board, with his own students making up the rest of the board. This gave Mr. Nakamura effective control and ownership of my personal properties and life's work to date.

When Mr. Nakamura asked me to sign these documents, he told me that I would still receive the royalties from my works, but I recently discovered that no such requirement was included in the legal documents. I now know that the documents state that I was effectively giving up my copyrights for the sole remuneration of US\$10.

Each time Mr. Nakamura brought me a document to sign, written all in English, he would explain to me that the document was only meant to protect me from people who would misuse and abuse my name and/or property. In hindsight, I should have sought independent counsel before signing such legal documents written in English, and not in my native language of Japanese. Because I trusted Mr. Nakamura implicitly at the time, I signed the documents as he presented them to me without seeking independent advice. However, I signed them without being fully informed of the consequences and risks.

In August of 2022, I invited Mr. Nakamura to Okinawa to tell him in person that I would be resuming the position of the IOGKF Chief Instructor. Mr. Nakamura agreed to my decision at the time and signed a document stating that fact.

In September of 2022 however, Mr. Nakamura reneged on his signed agreement. He began a concerted campaign of meetings, emails and social media posts inferring that I was incompetent and was being unduly influenced by people close to me who were out for their own gain. **This is untrue.**

Mr. Nakamura claimed that in 2012, when I appointed him as the IOGKF Chief Instructor, that I had given up all authority to make any decisions regarding the IOGKF. **This is untrue.** I never relinquished overall control and direction of the IOGKF, an organization where I spent much of my adult life working to develop.

In October of 2022, I invited Tetsuji Nakamura , Ernie Molyneux, Henrik Larsen and Jorge Monteiro to come to Okinawa for a meeting so that we could discuss the issues which had led to our split and to try and resolve our differences. The meeting was scheduled for 26 October 2022.

Shortly before the meeting was to take place, I received an email from the IOGKF EC with a list of demands, the most outrageous of which was that I must relinquish all authority and the right to make any decisions regarding the running of the IOGKF. It further stated that I was just a figurehead, "like the Emperor of Japan." Mr. Nakamura said that I must agree to these demands or they would not come to Okinawa. I told him that the meeting was for the purpose of discussing the problems that had arisen between us and that I would therefore not agree to anything before this meeting that would predetermine the outcome.

Mr. Nakamura, Mr. Molyneux, Mr. Larsen, and Mr. Monteiro did come to Okinawa and the meeting took place on 26 October 2022. The first thing they said to me is that I must agree to all the demands in their letter, and a lengthy discussion followed on the individual points.

Finally, Mr. Larsen said that I must agree to the demand that I no longer have any authority over the IOGKF, that I would be the technical authority only, asserting that it had been this way since 2012. I told them that I had never agreed to any such thing, then or now. I told them that I would resume the role of the IOGKF Chief Instructor and that Mr. Nakamura could be the Vice Chief Instructor.

They all said "No".

At that point I confirmed my resignation from the IOGKF and I asked that neither Mr. Nakamura nor any IOGKF member use my name or image in any manner going forward.

The meeting ended and Mr. Nakamura and the three EC members all stood up and walked out of Honbu Dojo, without bowing to Shomen.

This was the most hurtful thing to experience, even more disappointing than their lack of respect for me. Their behavior showed complete disrespect for the dojo and for the founding fathers of Okinawa Goju-Ryu, as well as a total lack of understanding for what the martial arts are all about. If their intention was to make the point that they do not recognize me as having any authority over the IOGKF or them, then they made their point clearly. The disrespectful way they acted in leaving the dojo is not acceptable behavior within traditional karate.

For this reason, I no longer acknowledge Tetsuji Nakamura, Ernie Molyneux, Henrik Larsen, and Jorge Monteiro as my students. I have severed all ties with Mr. Nakamura and the IOGKF and have asked them not to use my image or my previous publications in any manner that suggests I support them or the IOGKF, or that I voluntarily retired and ceded all control to Mr. Nakamura and the IOGKF EC members.

I regret having to correct the inaccurate, incomplete and misleading information that has been circulated about what happened and why. You are all free to form your own opinions. However, you now have the benefit of my response to various inferences that have been circulating for the past few months.

So now we move forward. I will continue to work as hard as ever to pass on what was passed down to me and to preserve traditional Okinawan Goju-Ryu for future generations. I am grateful to the many senior students who have always understood my vision and mission, and who have joined me and the TOGKF to ensure that the legacy of spreading traditional Okinawan Goju-Ryu Karate to all will endure.

We have several gasshuku planned for this year and I look forward to seeing and training with you soon.

Sincerely,  
Morio Higaonna

東恩納盛男 