

## An Open Letter to Master Tom MacCallum from Mr. Terence Geoghegan

May 29, 2002

Dear Master MacCallum:

It is with great sadness that I write this letter. I have held my tongue for the longest time, in spite of my concern over the increasingly bizarre pronouncements coming out of Vienna, not only because of my respect for you as an International Master Instructor, and as a senior administrator of the ITF, but also because I considered you a steadfast and generous friend, who had earned my personal admiration, as well as my professional respect.

For those who do not know of the many kindnesses that you showed me, I relate this story. In doing so, I need refer to no notes-although these events transpired some thirteen years ago, I remember them as if they were yesterday.

In the summer of 1989, as a second Dan, I arrived in Vienna, halfway through a five-year motorcycle trek around the northern hemisphere, as I pursued my degree in law. As my traveling partner and I were about to cross for the first time into the then-Soviet Bloc, we sought contacts in the ITF who might ease our travel through strange lands.

Your help was invaluable. It wasn't only that you provided us introductions to instructors such as Mr. (now Master) Toni Nobilo, who would give us information in Zagreb that would prove critical in seeing us safely through the conflict in Croatia. Or like Mr. (now Master) Stilianidis, who would help us to find lodging near Thessaloniki, as well, in Hungary and elsewhere, who aided our passage, whom we would not have met without your introduction.

But more than that, you helped us in Vienna, allowing me to both train at the ITF Headquarters and to teach the juniors there, as well as to teach at the American School in Vienna. In August of 1989, you graciously tested me for my third Dan.

I say this to make clear that I have no personal dispute with you, let alone any rancor. But you have recklessly taken actions that have transcended the limits of personal loyalty, and have caused great harm to many others whom I owe even greater loyalty. I speak here not only of my own instructor, but also of my own students, and of those who will come after. You have chosen to cross lines from which you should have stood back, and now you cannot look to place the blame elsewhere for your own folly.

Even back in 1989, it was apparent that Headquarters was staffed almost exclusively by North Koreans, but you had an explanation that seemed to make sense at the time. You explained that General Choi was, in essence, persona non grata in South Korea, and that it was only natural that he would therefore surround himself with the only fellow countrymen with whom he could associate. In retrospect, my acceptance of this explanation seems naïve in the extreme. Two queries, at least should have occurred to me, and should occur to any thinking person:

- 1) Were there no South Koreans at all who were willing to, or forced to, join the General in his exile? Obviously there were-for their absence from Headquarters, there must be other explanations.

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- 2) Considering the sheer impossibility of any North Korean leaving that country without leave of his despotic government was the very presence of these instructors not proof positive of their status as agents of the security services of North Korea? Of course it was; to suggest otherwise would indicate a level of credulity not to be readily accepted.

But at the time, I did not consider these obvious problems with your explanations.

For many years thereafter, I did not return to these subjects, although I did, on more than one occasion, draw the ire of senior members of the USTF for calling attention (as I had done since approximately 1984) to the inescapable-and-obvious-fact that no plans were being made to provide for an orderly succession in the ITF, upon the eventual retirement or death of the founder. Similarly (and with equally uncomfortable result), I had pointed out that the USTF itself would soon be left to drift, for failure of any plan for succession upon the eventual retirement or death of then-Master (now Grand Master) Sereff.

Approximately three years ago, I again wrote to Grand Master Sereff, pointing out the dangers of the ITF making no plans for an orderly succession. In this letter, I warned that, without an orderly succession, we would soon all be expected to take our orders from the North Koreans. This communication drew a particularly sharp rebuke from a senior Master of the USTF, who asked me how I dared to suggest such a thing, since Grand Master Sereff had fought against the Communists.

Little did I know, at the time, that the USTF, at its most senior levels, was well aware that the North Koreans were already running the ITF. This information, of course, was quite well known to you, and had been for some time.

There are those who would suggest that the teachings of our founder were always meant to be a gift to the peoples of all nations, and it might even be argued that the salves of despotic regimes are far more in need of such knowledge.

However, it is one thing to suggest that such unfortunates should be able to be seated at the table; it is quite another to suggest that the entire operation should be hijacked by a murderous regime in order to appeal to the vanity of, or to satiate the greed of, a criminal few.

To suggest that the takeover of the ITF by North Korea is value-neutral proposition is to reveal depravity, or idiocy, or both. (Grand Master Sereff clearly recognizes this when he authorized his response to my impetuous sounding of the tocsin. And yet, of course, the USTF was, or soon would be, up to its collective eyeballs in collusion in exactly this.) One might query, just what is meant when one proudly asserts:

“I shall be a champion of freedom and justice.”

“I shall build a more peaceful world.”

The bosses of the ITF, in Pyongyang, starve their slaves to death. The U.S. government (as is so often the case) is the leading supplier of relief, buying rice for the North Koreans, to stave off famine, so that the slave-masters can divert their precious and meager supply of hard currency to develop weapons systems to be sold to other totalitarian regimes. Just another nation to benefit from the precious gift of Taekwon-Do, yes?

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Our art, like many others, has fallen victim to a cult personality. It has made us blind to megalomania. (Have you not heard the founder compare himself to the Buddha or Jesus Christ?) It has made us turn away from the knowledge of the most hideous of alliances, such as we are discussing here. (This, of course, is not a failing of martial arts in particular, but of all cults of personality. One can point, as an obvious example, to the tendency of Mother Teresa to shill for such corrupt beasts as Baby Doc Duvalier. And of her sycophants to pretend that it wasn't happening, or to make excuses as those made by the adherents of General Choi have here.)

But this is where it was up to us to stand strong, and keep our art on a justifiable path, one where we could recite the Tenets, and our Student Oath, without snickering at the sick joke. And in this task, we were entitled to look to our leaders. To men like you, Master MacCallum.

And in this crucial moment, you failed us miserably.

We had a golden moment in Rimini. By whatever miracle, the General would retire, and there would be an orderly succession under a unified ITF, and we would not be dragged down by those who would manipulate the General's understandable reluctance to face the fact that it was time to go, and accept our reverence for his role as the founder, while enjoying a well-deserved retirement.

But no. There were geese to be slaughtered lest they should offer more golden eggs. The General might be senescent, or even suffering from senility or dementia, but that didn't mean that he couldn't be manipulated by those who stood to profit from the whoring of the corpse of the ITF to its North Korean masters.

And so you crossed your first Rubicon.

The "Congress" in Vienna. Or the not-a-Congress, as you claimed it to be, right before the doors slammed shut so that you could conduct the yes-it-is-a-Congress-after-all, and how about that?

Allow me to put on the lawyer hat for a moment. The illegality of this farce is so obvious as to be beyond serious discussion, let alone dispute. Here's the bare-bones truth of the matter: where a Constitution requires notice (as did the ITF Constitution), the failure of notice cannot be cured by the mere presence of an "accidental" quorum, without regard to whether or not that quorum was convened in bad faith. That's the law in the U.S.; that's the law in Austria; and-ask your solicitor-that's the law in your native Scotland. But, of course, you already knew that.

This was the inescapable conclusion proffered by the General's own personally-retained counsel, Mr. Michael Tibollo. He was conveniently railroaded out of town as soon as he became..let us say...inconvenient, but not competent lawyer will offer you an opinion at variance from this one. It isn't a close point of law, and you know it.

So did Master Renee Sereff and her lieutenant at the time of the vote, of course. But, whether from personal hatred toward Master Choi Jung Hwa, or out of some wildly mistaken delusion of self-interest, they decided to also invest in the sale of the ITF to North Korea.

But all of this prologue-through all of this, I could hold my tongue. But then you crossed your second Rubicon, and I could hold silent no more.

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In one of a series of your imperial pronouncements, published at [www.itf-generalchoi.com](http://www.itf-generalchoi.com), without comment, and dated only “May, 2002,” you claimed:

“ITF Members Expulsion”

“The ITF announce [sic] the following expulsions,”

”Fabian Nunez, Floyd Griffin, Mel Steiner, Walt Lang, Raymond Choy, Tham Ying Au, Ted Wolf, Trevor Nicholls, Ray Gayle, Carlos Martin, Antonio Troiano, John Cacioli, Zbigiew Kruk, Doug Nowling, Steve Weston, Micheal Muleta, Robert Wheatley, Chew Teck Seoung, Doug Arnold, Albert Camacho, John Rodriguez, Norber Ortiz, Rudolf Kan, Tsilfidis Lazaros, Ageev Vaslily, Kan Sergey, Kan Yuri, Suslin Vjacheslav.”

“This cancels all their certificates and qualifications.”

And finally I had had enough.

How dare you presume to “expel” these fellow practitioners, among whom are those that outrank you?

(And tell me, please-if I am not mistaken, all of those names that appear after that or Norber Ortiz were recently added, some time after the original publication. Is this list set to grow indefinitely? Or will you start a new one for June? And a longer one for July? A flood of names for August?)

Perhaps most unlawerlike, I shall not much belabor the obvious legal deficiencies in your notice of purported expulsions; I note that Master Steiner, in his analysis of yesterday, May 28, 2002, posted at <http://www.itf-information.com/B-28.htm>, has succinctly and comprehensively dealt with those. Rather, I will point out how your actions violate the simplest precepts of common sense.

There are two ways you can attempt to explain this vicious nonsense. The first is that there is some sort of “renegade” ITF, separate and quite publicly, announced their allegiance to Master Choi, and, perforce, according to this view, the “new” ITF.

In short, your “expulsion” must fail because you cannot fire people who have already quit.

The second explanation is even more wanting.

Under this view, there is only one ITF, with an incomplete schism, and a valid power struggle still continuing.

This is the only view under which you could claim any right to “expel” anyone, but under this scenario, just whom, Sir, do you think you have the right to speak for?

For the General? He’s gone, and he isn’t coming back. He’s outlived his usefulness as your Golem. (Don’t believe me? Got to <http://www.korea-np.co.jp/pk/>, and type “Choi Hong Hi” into the search window. Surprise! And please note that it appears that the General himself has no more use for you-look at the

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information that the General provided even to the North Koreans, concerning where the ITF is headquarter, and where its website is located. Were you surprised that the General was so quick to wash his hands of you?)

Or do you pretend to speak for the voters who thought that they could overturn the results of a lawful election that didn't suit their craven purposes?

And what would be the point, in any case? Do you imagine that anyone pays any more attention to your increasingly desperate pronouncements? Here in California, the majority of instructors have cast their lot with Master Choi. But do you imagine for a moment that USTF loyalists will be unwelcome among us? And do you imagine for a moment that the bonds that we have forged will lead the USTF loyalists to turn their backs on us?

I have spoken to instructors who have announced their intention to remain with the USTF, out of personal loyalty to Grand Master Sereff, until such time as he should die or retire. After that, who will carry your water here? Master DeBaca? Nice gentleman. Nice try. Master Sereff? Please. (And, by the way, let's call a spade a spade-it isn't "sexism," which is the usual excuse given for the common knowledge that Master Sereff commands no personal loyalty. It's because of the widespread perception that her vote at Vienna, to cite just one example, was par for the course.)

Let me not be coy here. Let me parse how I see these two conflicting theories by which you might try, in vain, to retain some right to "expel" persons over whom you have no power.

There is only one ITF. Master Choi is its only legitimate President. But if this is not universally accepted, we'll stay, and we'll fight it out, and in the end-long after you are as gone as you are now embarrassing and superfluous-we will prevail.

I have been guilty as others as fuzzing the distinction between these two views of the ongoing struggle. For the longest time, I determined that I would not "quit" the USTF; after all, if you have one thousand sailors on a ship, and the captain announces his intent to steam directly into an iceberg, it is hardly rational for all the sailors to abandon ship. Rather, they have the right-indeed, the duty-to relieve the captain of his command and set the ship right. That is the situation in which the USTF now finds itself.

And I had intended to throw down the gauntlet-to send in my 2002 application, and membership check, and announce, like Martin Luther nailing his infamous theses to the church door in Wittenberg, my challenges to the current idiocies being shopped about in Bloomfield. I fully expected to be "expelled," which would certainly be a legitimate response.

Well, it's a bit late for that, yes? Here I am, having accepted a position of senior leadership in a rival organization. No reason to be bashful at this point.

But at the international level-with the ITF-now that's a different matter. Here we stand, and we defy you. You would say of my instructor, Master Robert Wheatley, and others, that your unattributed pronouncement "cancels all their certificates and qualifications"? By what right? By what reason? Have these persons not earned their certificates and qualifications? I note that among the list of those supposedly expelled, we find

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some of the most active instructors in the world. Unlike those who sit around in business suits, rarely if ever practicing the art. Should we investigate how those types of persons came by their advanced degrees?

And who are the members of this mysterious “Consultative Council,” to whom you refer in your self-serving rant of March, 2002, and by what mechanism did they concur in these putative “expulsions”?

Sir, you had not the right.

And before we leave you're posting of March, 2002 (which can be seen at [www.itf-generalchoi.com](http://www.itf-generalchoi.com)), let me comment on one other statement that you made therein:

You stated:

“We welcome action by anyone to challenge us in a court of law.”

Now, to the legally unsophisticated, unfamiliar with the burden of proof in a civil action, this may seem like a reasonable invitation, designed to show, by the absence of a formal lawsuit against you, the validity of your actions. You, of course, know better. Could we, in a court of law, demonstrate the illegality of the vote in Vienna? Of course. But aside from creating employment for many lawyers, what would this gain us that we do not stand to gain by simply awaiting your collapse?

Put the show on the other foot. If, indeed, we are infringing on your legal right to the name “International Taekwon-Do Federation” by claiming that it is we in Canada, and not you in Vienna, who are the legitimate organization, then why do you not sue us? We have not been reticent about our addresses; your process servers know where to find us.

The reason that you have not, and will not, take such action, is that you know full well that you have no legal basis to do so.

We can wait, and we will, knowing that the next river your career will cross will be not yet another Rubicon, but the Styx.

In closing, allow me a brief note about this curious letter of May 10, 2002, from Master Stilianidis to Master Choi. Master Stilianidis claims to speak, not for any group or individual instructors, but for twenty-eight entire countries. Are we to understand that the original ITF, as opposed to the ITF-North Korea, has not a single adherent instructor in any one of these twenty-eight nations?

I am sure that the USTF has made the necessary arrangements to continue its allegiance to the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea, and its satellite office in Vienna. Are we therefore to conclude that the original ITF, now headquartered in Canada, has no members in the United States?

What are we to make of these curious statements?

In a way, you are like the General, Master MacCallum. Perhaps that was your hope, but such a station comes at a price. Like the rising tide, you properly had your time to thunder upon the beach, and to make your mark upon the sand. And like any tide, to recede in the appointed moment, and to make way for others, in the fullness of time, to take their rightful place in the succession of the ages.

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How sad that you chose to instead to be dragged, kicking and screaming, from the proscenium.

This letter has not been easy for me. Long ago, in Vienna, when the world seemed younger, we shared the conversation of many an evening. Over a cup of coffee, or over a beer, I thought that we shared a vision. But you have made unfortunate choices, and your time is come, and your time is gone. Please don't subject yourself to more disrepute than you already have.

My best to Morag, and to Ruaridh, and to Struan, and, in spite of all, to you.

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