



Statement regarding the Disaster on Maui

I would like to express my deepest condolences to those who lost their lives as a result of the disaster in Maui, and my heartfelt sympathy to those who have lost their homes and are living as evacuees.

The fire that broke out on August 8, 2023, devastated the city of Lahaina. As of today, 93 people are confirmed to have died, and more than 2,000 buildings have been damaged or destroyed. The historic town of Lahaina, which was once the capital of the Hawaiian Kingdom and a beautiful tourist destination visited by many people, was burnt to the ground.

Lahaina Hongwanji Mission, located in the center of the city, was not spared the destruction by the fire. The Resident Minister, Reverend Ai Hironaka, his family, and many of the temple members have safely evacuated and are currently living a life of inconvenience. As for the damage to the temple, it is expected to take some time to confirm its state, partly because the town is under lockdown.

The history of the Lahaina Hongwanji Mission began in 1904. Since then, the light of the Nembutsu Dharma has been successfully passed down through the dedication and contribution of the Resident Ministers, their families, temple members, and many people in the community. Lahaina Hongwanji Mission, along with other churches and temples, was the place of refuge for the people living in the area. I remember the sound of the Nembutsu reverberating in the Hondo on Sundays. It is truly sad for all of us that such a practice hall of the Nembutsu was destroyed by the disaster.

The Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii established the Maui Wildfire Disaster Relief Fund. Since then, we have received much support not only from within the State of Hawaii but also from all over the world, including the mainland United States, Canada, and Japan. On behalf of the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii ministers and members, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to those who extended compassionate words and actions for those on Maui. I would like to humbly ask for your continued support.

Recovery on Maui could take years. Many people are living in anxiety about their uncertain future. As fellow travelers of the Nembutsu, let us stand in solidarity with those who are experiencing suffering and sorrow brought about by this unprecedented encounter.

Even though the temple buildings have been damaged, our sincere aspiration of listening to and sharing the Nembutsu teaching never disappears. This is not the end of 119 years of the history of Lahaina Hongwanji. We are all the more determined to dedicate ourselves to establishing a society where the sound of the Nembutsu prevails.

May the Wisdom and Compassion of Amida Buddha embrace us all. May the sound of the Nembutsu brings us peace and comfort, and gives us the courage to move forward. Namo Amida Butsu.

Rev. Toshiyuki Umitani
Bishop
Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii

August 13, 2023