

## Statement on the Maui Wildfires in Hawai`i

### Society of Architectural Historians Heritage Conservation Committee

The Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) joins with an international group of architectural historians, architects, preservationists, and others to express our deepest sympathies to those impacted by the wildfire that devastated parts of Maui on 8 August 2023, and destroyed the town of Lāhainā. The catastrophic loss of life, as well as the many injured and those still missing, are of first concern. As well, many who survived lost homes, businesses, and livelihoods.

The damage to Lāhainā, the capital of the Kingdom of Hawai`i for decades, is immense; many sacred and culturally significant sites are believed to have been lost. The Waiola Church, where several members of the Hawaiian royal family are buried, was destroyed along with numerous other culturally and historically significant places. While the focus now is on caring for the living and mourning the dead, the work of cataloging the cultural losses has only just begun. As that work proceeds, it is important that it be led by Native Hawai`ian voices so that recovery—in whatever form that takes—is culturally appropriate. We implore Hawai`i's leadership to avoid prioritizing tourism over the wishes of those to whom those sites are sacred, bearers of great cultural meaning.

These devastating wildfires, driven by hurricane winds and aggravated by drought and colonial exploitation of the natural and cultural landscape, are unfortunately only the most recent in a series of natural disasters. Exacerbated by climate change, these increasingly common disasters unduly impact Indigenous communities and their cultural heritage. SAH recognizes that the challenges of cultural recovery are enormous and that, in many instances, reconstruction and restoration will be required. The preservation of these cultural resources is, however, essential to recovery, and must be undertaken in close and meaningful consultation with those most affected. Without them, the cultural touchstones of Hawai`i's Indigenous community will be lost.

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