

Visit by Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress



▲ Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress speaking to residents affected by the disaster at Utatsu Junior High School, which has been used as an evacuation center, in Minamisanriku.
Photo courtesy of Kahoku Shimpo

On April 27, 2011, Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress (Now Emperor Emeritus and Empress Emerita) visited Minamisanriku, where the scars of the tsunami were still fresh. After inspecting the devastated urban area from the schoolyard of Isatomae Elementary School, Their Majesties faced the sea and bowed in silence.

At Utatsu Junior High School, which had been used as an evacuation center, they approached the disaster victims, knelt on the tatami mats, and expressed kind words of sympathy for over 30 minutes, keeping their gaze at the same level as that of the affected residents. On this day, the Emperor and Empress extended the length of their visit by 10 minutes. Residents who spoke with Their Majesties shed tears, saying, "I am filled with gratitude. Their visit will encourage me to face the future and try my best."

Three years later, in the summer, Their Majesties visited Minamisanriku again. They toured the temporary Minamisanriku Sun Sun Shopping Village in the Shizugawa district, offering the shopkeepers words of encouragement.

Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress's constant concern for the disaster area is an ongoing source of emotional support for the affected residents.