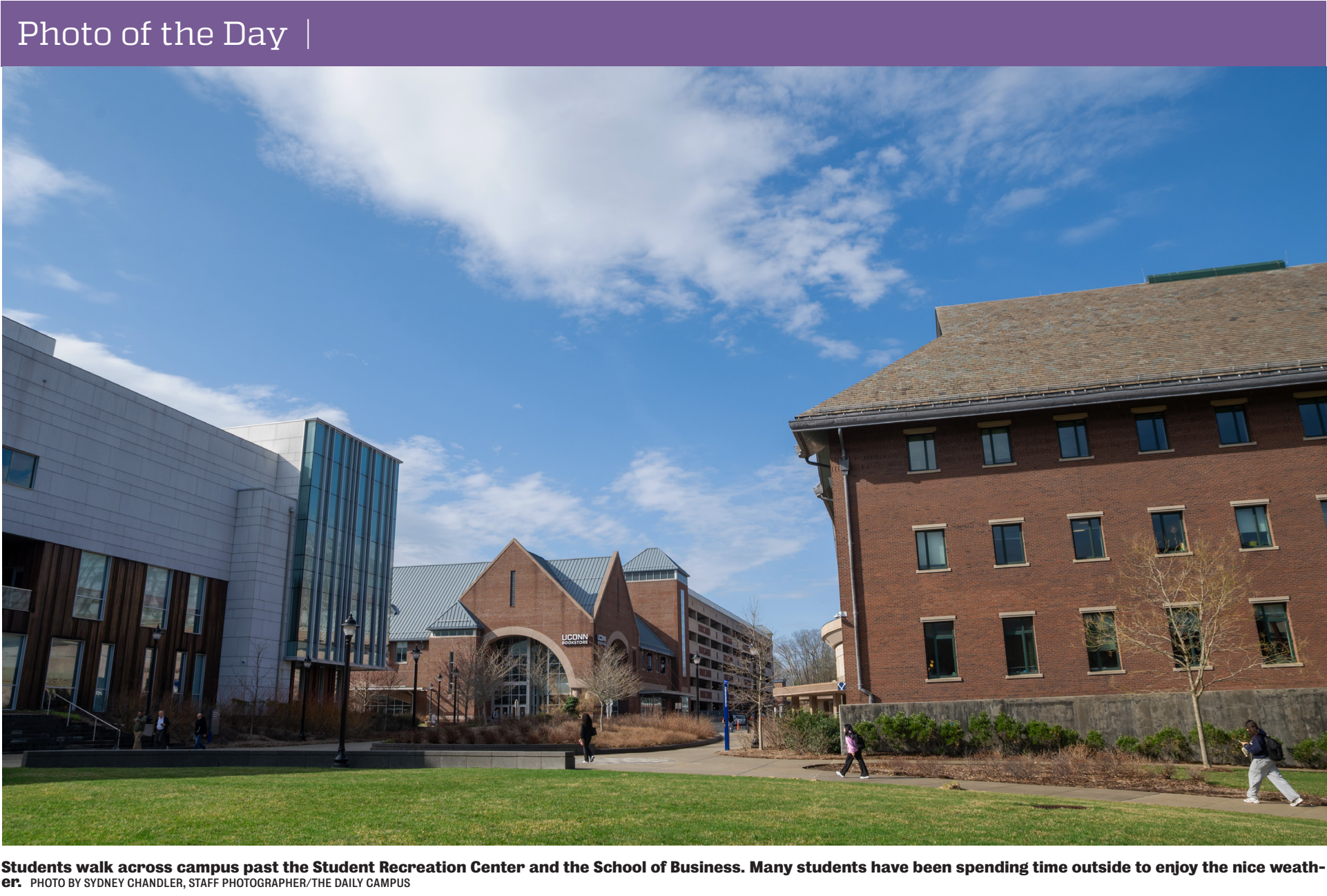




Students walk across campus past the Student Recreation Center and the School of Business. Many students have been spending time outside to enjoy the nice weather. PHOTO BY SYDNEY CHANDLER, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

A Hierarchy for Crimes:

WHY THE UN’S LATEST RESOLUTION IS UNPROFESSIONAL

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This past week, the UN voted on a resolution that officially named the Transatlantic Slave Trade the “Gravest crime against humanity” and called for reparations. On a surface level, this resolution appears to be a simple clean sweep, but it was not. 52 nations abstained while three voted against it. Of those who abstained and voted against it, a similar reason emerged: we shouldn’t put hierarchies on crimes against humanity.

Using the word “gravest” implied that there was a hierarchy on crimes against humanity. This wording can diminish other injustices that are of a different nature, which is unprofessional, problematic and downright unethical. We as humans should not decide what crime falls into what category because that can breed impunity and denial, and when those ideas take hold, they are hard to uproot. With impunity, those who have committed crimes are able to walk free with almost no legal ramifications. They can also feel enabled to continue committing crimes because they were not held responsible for past actions. With denial, those people who hold ideas of denial can downplay or spread falsehoods. With a hierarchy they can avoid the top crimes but can easily pick off those seen as less in international eyes. When ideas of denial and impunity grow, those who hold those beliefs feel empowered by the lack of push back. This empowerment can grow when crimes become a hierarchy.

Though it should be noted, we should not swing the pendulum too far for the same reason, because on the opposite end, ideas of apathy run rampant on the opposite end. Equally, brushing crimes under the rug with statements such as “it was so long ago” and “everyone who experienced it is now dead” should also be crushed. When it comes to resolutions like these, we must find the middle ground that does not diminish the crime itself nor compares it to other crimes.

The UN should rewrite the resolution to clearly state that, yes, the Transatlantic Slave trade was a grave crime against humanity, but should stop short

of calling it the gravest. No professional legislative action should ever hold the word gravest in regard to crimes. They should also clearly define who is the receiver of the reparations. A resolution from an International Body should be clear and precise. It should avoid generalizing or blanket statements. This is not a resolution for the UN but a resolution for humanity. Humanity as a whole should understand the horrors of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, but an international body should not deem any crime as gravest or above the rest.

The problem with reparations is that it should not go to a country’s government, but to the people whose families were impacted by the Transatlantic Slave Trade. A government should not receive money based on the loose historical connection to the people who were actually impacted. To pay money to a government and not the people is purely a slap in the face towards those seeking justice and retribution for their ancestors. No matter who is paying the money, it should be delivered only to those whose ancestors were impacted.

The UN needs to set up channels and resources not for governments but for the everyday person. Governments need to be hands-off in regard to reparations. The UN should first begin to look inward at their own practices and how they would handle distributing real payment before advancing actual discussions of monetary transactions between international parties. If they don’t fix their practices, resolutions like these end up just being for pomp and circumstance and for international parties to pat themselves on the back. It makes the UN look like a stage for performers rather than a serious international union focused on making the world a better place for everyone.

When it comes to resolutions, it’s better to admit faults within the language and fix it rather than point fingers and take sides. The UN should be for the eight billion people who call Earth their home, not for the 193 ambassadors. If they cannot see the error of their ways, then maybe the UN is closer to becoming like the League of Nations: obsolete.



An irrigation ditch sits unused. The farmer fallowed a field due to a lack of water in Knights Landing, California in 2021. PHOTO COURTESY OF @LATIMESFOOD ON PINTREST

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Humanity has always strived towards the impossible. At the dawn of time, we harnessed fire. At the turn of the 19th century, we channeled the power of lightning into homes. Even now, we harness the power of atoms to create energy worldwide. Nonetheless, our affinity for the unimaginable has often cost us. In January, the UN declared humanity’s most recent inconceivable act: our complete disruption of the planet’s water cycles. Thanks to our thirst for industry — driven in part by the artificial intelligence boom — we are now outpacing Earth’s ability to replenish the water we use daily. The consequences are apocalyptic: Drought-driven famines are expected to rapidly rise in regularity, exposing nearly 1.2 billion to starvation. Already, the world’s cities are rushing to ration their water. Many, including Los Angeles, Mexico City and Cape Town, have already come within a hair’s breadth of “zero day” — when their city completely runs out of water. To enforce the need for strict water management, these metropolises have unleashed a myriad of conservation policies. Notably, all maintain a strict punishment towards any who exceed their water allowances, levying incremental fines against violators. These policies, however, are insufficient. Not only do they inadvertently exempt the rich, but harm those who stay within the bounds of the law. Global policy change is needed to ensure fair and equitable punishment can be applied to those who would display wanton ignorance in the face of an existential threat. Without a shift in our law, our planet will fail to recover the water we have lost.

In 2015, Los Angeles made global headlines for its water restrictions in the face of then-unprecedented drought. What caught

the world’s attention, however, was not the state’s first-of-its-kind policy. It was those that ignored it. Celebrities of the region, including Kim Kardashian, Jennifer Lopez and Barbra Streisand boasted of their green lawns and filled swimming pools as the rest of the state rationed toilet water. For instance, the Kardashian family’s water limit exceeded their county limit by 333,000 gallons in June of that year. Despite multiple fines by the state, the Kardashians and other members of the upper class continued to waste water. Why? Because, in their eyes, the fine for overconsumption was trivial, with the highest possible cost of their crime being only \$600.

As global drought has intensified, so has the impact of class on urban sustainability attempts. In Mexico City — where over half the population has had their water turned off — affluent, majority-white neighborhoods are allowed to continue to use near-limitless amounts of water. To offset this waste, low-income and minority neighborhoods are forced to choose between drinking the dirty water of public fountains or buying from predatory private companies. Once again, the law prioritizes the wants of the wealthier class over the needs of the less-well-off majority.

In Cape Town, Africa, the story is all too familiar. During the city’s historic water shortage of 2018, the richest 14% of the population accounted for 51% of Cape Town’s water use. By contrast, the poorest 62% were only able to use 27% of the water. Just as in LA, the reason for this disparity was simple: in a city with extreme wealth disparity, the rich were able to pay off their fines. The masses could not.

In fairness, fines are a common form of punishment for various offenses in urban policy. On paper, they prevent individuals from breaking the law by imposing a financial deterrent on the offender. Yet, in a world where the richest 1%

hold \$153 trillion in financial assets, these costs are too often negligible for the wealthy, who can easily afford to pay the fine and continue their unlawful behavior.

This inequity serves only to hurt the law. Through their continued use of excess water, the upper class takes water away from those who stay within mandated limits. Policy makers are then forced to further lower available water use, creating a self-perpetuating cycle where the rich are allowed to live in excess while the masses continue to suffer.

To account for this gap in global water policy’s armor, the financial system must be modified in order to take into account the ability of violators to pay fines. Thankfully, a model for this system already exists: Finland, for instance, has found remarkable success with its “day fines.” Under this policy, penalties are calculated based on the offender’s daily income. The model has been widely praised for both its fairness and proportionality. Implementing similar systems worldwide would not be out of the question. Such a policy would provide a route for both high and low-income individuals to face proportionately similar fines, creating equal incentives for both to stay within the margins of city water allowances. Furthermore, the increase in money generated from such fines would allow governments to reinvest into climate budgets: allowing them to invest in infrastructure to offset drought losses.

If humanity wants to survive in a world running out of water, drastic changes in policy must be made. In a world rapidly confronting the absence of its most vital natural resources, the excess wants of the few cannot exceed the basic needs of the many. The law must be restructured to provide equal protection for all underneath it — and equitable punishment for all who would defy it.