

The First Lady Jeannette Kagame on Friday urged young Rwandans to take pride in their country and defend its unity, warning that genocide ideology remains a threat even three decades after the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

Speaking to more than 2,000 youth gathered at the annual *Igihango cy'Urungano* (Covenant of a Generation) forum in Rusororo, Kigali, Mrs Kagame emphasized that although today's youth did not choose Rwanda's violent history, they have a responsibility to uphold the truth and reject divisive narratives.

"You were born in Rwanda, and Rwanda was born in you," she said. "This is the only country we have, and there is no one else to claim it for us."

The forum, now in its 12th edition, brings together youth leaders from across the country to commemorate their peers killed in the genocide and to promote unity, truth, and resilience.

The First Lady reminded participants that genocide is not a spontaneous tragedy but a carefully planned campaign aimed at eradicating a group of people.

"Genocide doesn't start with weapons. It starts with words—words that strip others of their humanity and distort the truth little by little," she said. "That's how neighbors began to see each other as something to get rid of."

The First Lady warned that the trauma caused by the genocide, along with the ideology behind it, can be passed down across generations. She called on youth to remain alert, especially amid increasing misinformation and denialism on social media.

"Social media was meant to spread knowledge and entertainment, but today it has become a battlefield where truth is deliberately distorted," she said. "False narratives are shared to sow doubt and confusion, even about the progress you've witnessed in your own country."



She urged young people to think critically about the messages they consume and to ask who benefits from campaigns that discredit Rwanda's achievements or question its past.

"Ask yourselves: Where were these voices when Rwanda was in ruins?" Kagame

said. "And when have they ever celebrated our progress?"

The event featured discussions on national history, reconciliation, and the role of youth in shaping Rwanda's future. Organizers stressed the importance of building a nation free from genocide ideology and committed to justice and unity.

"This is not just about remembrance," Kagame said. "It's about ensuring that what happened never happens again. Let no one divide us or distort what history has taught us."

The *Igihango cy'Urungano* forum began in 2013 and is held annually as part of the national genocide commemoration period in April.