

Rwandan justice officials are expanding the use of mediation as the country's prison population climbs to more than 70,000 inmates, including over 23,000 people jailed this year alone, according to the Rwanda Correctional Service (RCS).

Commissioner General Evariste Murenzi said Monday that the country's correctional facilities are also holding more than 500 foreign nationals, most of whom were convicted of crimes involving forged documents or assault. He said the rising inmate population has intensified the need for alternatives that ease pressure on the system.

Murenzi delivered the update during a press briefing organized by the Supreme Court to launch Justice Week, an annual campaign aimed at widening access to justice services, reducing court backlogs and encouraging out-of-court settlements. The event gathered officials from across the justice sector, including the Rwanda National Police and the Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB).

"At the moment, we are housing more than 500 foreigners from different countries and continents," Murenzi said. "From January to present, we have received more than 23,000 inmates." He added that while stricter enforcement has helped deter some offenses, prison overcrowding remains a challenge.

RCS reports that the two most common crimes involving foreign nationals are document forgery and assault. Murenzi said the trend highlights the need for stronger preventive measures and continued vigilance at borders and checkpoints.

The Rwanda National Police reiterated that the country's laws apply uniformly to all offenders, whether Rwandan or foreign. Once arrested, suspects are transferred to RIB for investigation and may be prosecuted if evidence supports the charges.

Supreme Court President Domitilla Mukabarisa highlighted the government's efforts to strengthen a citizen-centered justice system that prioritizes fairness and accessibility. She said mediation has become one of the justice sector's most effective tools for resolving disputes without lengthy court processes. "We have now resolved more than 20,000 cases through mediation," she said.

Justice officials said, this year's Justice Week will focus on reducing the number of pending cases, expanding community outreach and reinforcing cooperation among justice institutions. They said the initiative is expected to relieve pressure on the prison system while improving public confidence in Rwanda's legal processes.