

Minister of National Unity and Civic Engagement, Dr. Jean Damascène Bizimana, said Thursday that the Congregation of the Benebikira Sisters should be recognized as *Guardians of the Covenant* for their extraordinary efforts to promote unity and save lives during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

Bizimana made the remarks at the launch of a new book by Sister Murekatete Anne Beatha, a member of the Benebikira Congregation. The 170-page book, written in French, documents how the sisters protected people during the Genocide and contributed to rebuilding Rwanda afterward.

Founded in 1919, the Benebikira Sisters are Rwanda's first indigenous Catholic congregation. During the Genocide, none of their institutions participated in the killings. Instead, they sheltered and defended those who sought refuge with them.

At Groupe Scolaire Sainte Bernadette in Save, 160 sisters refused to separate themselves by ethnicity, an act that saved their lives and those of 271 others who stayed under their protection for nearly a month.

Bizimana praised Sister Murekatete's courage for writing about the tragedy, noting that she is only the second Benebikira nun in three decades to publish a book on the Genocide, following Sister Mukabayire Marie Josée earlier this year.

"These actions deserve recognition," Bizimana said. "You honored your faith and the covenant of humanity by standing for what was right. Let this process of acknowledging your heroism begin — it's long overdue."



Sister Murekatete served as headmistress of Sainte Bernadette from 1992 to 2004 and was among those targeted during the Genocide. Her book recounts events from 1990 to 1994, describing how the Benebikira were accused of opposing the regime because they rejected ethnic divisions.

Eighteen sisters and four postulants were killed after refusing to separate themselves by ethnicity.

Now retired, Murekatete said the congregation focused on rebuilding lives after 1994, opening schools for orphans and leading programs promoting reconciliation and human rights education.

“If those 160 sisters at Save had died, our congregation would have been broken,” she said. “We must continue to stand together, because unity is what restores our humanity.”