The Ministry of National Unity and Civic Engagement says it will take action against schools that punish or discourage students from speaking Kinyarwanda, warning that such practices undermine national identity and unity.

The ministry said some schools, including those offering international curricula, have reportedly penalized students for using Kinyarwanda, promoting foreign languages instead. Officials say the trend has contributed to growing stigma around the national language, with some Rwandans viewing fluent use of Kinyarwanda as outdated.

In some cases, parents boast that their children do not speak Kinyarwanda, treating the inability to use the language as a sign of social status. Authorities say such attitudes are sometimes reinforced by schools that restrict or ban the use of Kinyarwanda on campus.

Minister of National Unity and Civic Engagement Jean Damascene Bizimana said the government will engage schools found to be punishing students for speaking Kinyarwanda. Working with the Ministry of Education and other institutions, he said the government will ensure that no child is penalized for using the national language.

“If there are schools that punish a child for speaking Kinyarwanda, we will go there and address it,” Bizimana said. “Speaking Kinyarwanda is not a crime.”

Bizimana said schools may teach in foreign languages, particularly those following international education programs, but stressed that this should not prevent students from speaking their mother tongue. He warned that punishing students can create fear and cause children to associate their own language with wrongdoing.

“When a child grows up afraid of their own language, that is a serious problem,” he said, adding that international schools should also offer Kinyarwanda as a subject.

A cultural assessment conducted by the National Council for Culture in August 2025 found that 99.7% of Rwandans speak Kinyarwanda. However, 70.6% of respondents reported poor use of the language, with 6.6% saying their usage was completely inadequate and 64.3% describing it as unsatisfactory.

Bizimana said addressing the issue will require joint efforts from families, schools

and government institutions to preserve and strengthen Kinyarwanda.