Rwanda’s professional court bailiffs have renewed calls for the Ministry of Justice to revise the 2017 ministerial order that sets their compensation, arguing that it no longer reflects current economic realities or the complexity of their work.

The issue was raised Friday during the annual general assembly of Rwanda’s professional court bailiffs, attended by representatives from the Ministry of Justice.

Under the current ministerial order, a court bailiff is paid 20,000 Rwandan francs for facilitating an amicable execution of a judgment between parties. In cases of forced debt collection through public auction, bailiffs receive 5% of the recovered value. However, for court-enforced actions without a monetary value, the maximum compensation is capped at 1 million francs.

Jean Aimé Niyonkuru, president of the Rwanda Professional Bailiffs Association, said the payment structure is outdated.

“That 5% fee only applies if a bailiff carries out a public auction. But often we recover funds directly, for instance by freezing a bank account. In such cases, we receive nothing beyond the flat rate, yet the work done is the same,” Niyonkuru said.

He added that this discourages bailiffs from pursuing out-of-court settlements or efficient enforcement methods that don’t end in auctions, which he said undermines justice service delivery.

Professional bailiff Me Safari Mihigo echoed these concerns, saying the law exposes bailiffs to financial loss. “We handle asset valuation, issue public notices, and carry out procedures, only for a judge to cancel the auction at the last minute. All those costs fall on us,” Mihigo said.

Previously, bailiffs could claim up to 500,000 francs for preparatory work, which provided partial relief. But the current framework leaves them vulnerable to litigation from clients who may accuse them of procedural violations, further discouraging their work.

In response, Mariam Gahongayire, Director General for Access to Justice at the Ministry of Justice, acknowledged the concerns and said the government is working on a solution.

“This is not the first time this issue has been raised. It came up in last year’s

general assembly as well. The Ministry, together with other institutions, is reviewing the law to align compensation with current market realities," she said.

Court bailiffs play a crucial role in enforcing judicial decisions, often navigating complex and contentious disputes. Their association is advocating for a revised fee structure that ensures fair compensation and upholds the integrity of their profession.