

Rwanda's Supreme Court has launched a groundbreaking prison reconciliation program, giving inmates the chance to admit guilt, seek forgiveness, and reintegrate into society. Officials say the initiative promotes justice, rehabilitation, and social harmony, while also helping to ease prison overcrowding.

Supreme Court President Domitilla Mukantaganzwa emphasized that the program benefits both offenders and the nation, which regards prisoners as its own children.

"Admitting guilt helps all of us, especially since reconciliation applies to all crimes," she said during the official launch at Nyarugenge Prison in Mageragere Sector. She added that reducing overcrowding is not the primary goal, but rather a positive side effect of the initiative.



The program, attended by officials from the Rwanda Correctional Service (RCS), the Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB), police, prosecutors, and judiciary representatives, allows offenders to acknowledge wrongdoing, reconcile with victims, and enter formal agreements with the prosecution. These agreements are reviewed and approved by the courts before any release is granted.

On the day of the launch, 85 prisoners in Kigali signed agreements and were immediately released. CSP Sengabo Hillary Emmanuel, RCS spokesperson, stressed that participation is not a privilege but an opportunity for offenders to take responsibility for their actions.

"If you commit a crime and are caught, you should admit it and ask for forgiveness. This can lead to reduced or suspended sentences, and in some cases, you may avoid prison entirely," he said.

Among those released was Mucyo Fatia, convicted of embezzlement, who said the program allowed him to return to his family while giving victims a sense of closure. "Admitting your crime helps you move on and helps the victim feel at peace," he noted.

Legal practitioner Justin Rwabigwi, involved with the program for three years, said sentences may be reduced or suspended depending on the terms of the agreements. Since the program began, over 23,000 offenders have participated, with Nyarugenge Prison, which houses 10,813 inmates—including 1,315 women—reporting that around 65% of inmates are serving time for assault, battery,

or theft.

The initiative reflects Rwanda's ongoing efforts to balance justice, rehabilitation, and community reintegration, offering a path for offenders to make amends while contributing to a safer and more harmonious society.