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THE CROCODILE QUESTION

Why deadly attacks continue along the Copperbelt's rivers—and why authorities still don't know exactly where the danger is greatest

“It hit her with its tail before dragging her into the stream,” she said.

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The Crocodile Question

By Mercy Mulenga | Kitwe

The Copperbelt's rivers have long powered Zambia's mining industry, sustained farming communities and shaped the province's economic identity.

Increasingly, however, they are becoming the scene of a different kind of tragedy

From Chingola to Kitwe, crocodile attacks are claiming lives and leaving children permanently injured in communities better known for copper mining than human-wildlife conflict.

Yet MakaanDay has found that despite the growing number of attacks, Zambia's wildlife authorities do not systematically record the precise locations where crocodile incidents occur using Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates — a gap that wildlife experts say makes it more difficult to identify hotspots, target patrols and deploy preventive measures before lives are lost.

Official figures from the Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPW) show that the Copperbelt Province recorded 18 crocodile attacks in 2024, rising to 21 in 2025. Most victims were swimming, fishing, farming or carrying out other routine activities along rivers and streams, with children accounting for many of those injured or killed.

The latest victim was seven-year-old Gloria Mwimanzi who was killed by a crocodile on 6 May 2026 while fishing with other children near Chabanyama Stream in Chingola District.

Her death has renewed questions that extend beyond a single tragedy. Why are crocodile attacks becoming more common in a province not traditionally regarded as one of Zambia's major wildlife conflict hotspots? And if authorities know attacks continue to occur, how are they deciding where prevention efforts should be focused? Those are the questions MakaanDay set out to answer.

The Chingola tragedy

On the morning of 6 May, seven children from the same community walked to Chabanyama, a nearby stream to fish.

According to the girl's grandfather Benson Mafuta, two of the children were his grandchildren while the others were neighbours. None expected the outing to end in tragedy. The oldest survivor, aged between 12 and 14, recalled that the younger girl entered the water while the others were fishing. Moments later, a crocodile struck.

"It hit her with its tail before dragging her into the stream," she said.

One of the survivors said several hours passed before police arrived at the scene, by which time the search had been suspended until the following day. The girl's body was recovered several days later in a decomposed state and buried the same day. For her family, they say they never knew a crocodile inhabited the stream.

Nearby farmers, however, told MakaanDay they had encountered the reptile on several occasions while working in their fields and considered it large enough to attack even a fully grown adult. Despite their knowledge of its presence, they said there were no warning signs or public notices alerting residents to the danger.

A Province better know for Copper than crocodiles

For many Zambians, crocodile attacks are more readily associated with the Luangwa Valley, the Zambezi River or Lake Kariba than with the Copperbelt. Yet official data suggests the province has become an increasingly important hotspot for human-crocodile conflict.

Figures obtained from the Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPW) show that 18 crocodile attacks were recorded on the Copperbelt in 2024, rising to 21 in 2025. The incidents involved people swimming, fishing, farming, collecting water and carrying out other routine activities along rivers and streams. Children accounted for many of the victims.

The figures, wildlife officials say, almost certainly underestimate the scale of the problem because not every incident is reported to the department.

Hospital records paint a similarly worrying picture.

Kitwe Teaching Hospital, the province's main referral hospital, continues to receive victims of crocodile attacks from communities along the Kafue River and its tributaries.

Hospital Public Relations Officer Hellen Chitima said the hospital treated four crocodile attack victims in 2025.

Two boys were attacked while swimming, leaving one with injuries so severe that doctors amputated his right arm. Another patient was attacked while fishing, while a fourth sustained injuries while washing clothes in the river. The hospital has already recorded another crocodile attack this year.

The victims treated so far have ranged in age from nine to fifteen years, reinforcing concerns that children remain among those most at risk because they frequently use rivers for recreation, fishing and domestic chores.

The danger is not confined to Chingola and Kitwe. Last year, a 12-year-old boy from Mufulira sustained serious injuries after being attacked by a crocodile while near a stream, adding to a growing list of incidents reported across the province.

Although the Copperbelt's rivers continue to sustain farming, fishing and mining activities, they are also becoming places where everyday tasks carry an increasing risk.

Why are attacks becoming more frequent on the Copperbelt? Wildlife officials and environmental experts point to a combination of changing environmental conditions and increasing human activity along rivers.

Environmentalist Dr Mweene Himwinga said one important factor is the heavy rains experienced last year which swelled waterways across Zambia, bringing crocodiles into shallow waters and increasing contact with communities.

"Elevated water levels bring species like crocodiles nearer to dry land," she said.

"Encroachment into protected areas also disturbs natural habitats."

DNPW officials also attribute the increase to habitat disturbance caused by mining, agricultural expansion and settlement along waterways, which has brought more people into contact with crocodile habitat.

For families living along the Kafue River, Chabanyama Stream, Mwambashi Stream and other waterways, fetching water, washing clothes or casting a fishing line has become an activity that can end in tragedy.

This article was produced by MakaanDay's Local Reporting Network. Subscribe through our website and follow our Facebook page to receive stories like this one as soon as they are published.



FACT CHECK | Does Zambia's US\$6.5 Billion in Foreign Reserves Really Exist?

By Ennety Munshya

Claim

In a [video](#) widely shared on Facebook, National Reconciliation Party for Unity and Prosperity presidential aspirant Brian Mundubile and his running mate, Makebi Zulu, claimed that President Hakainde Hichilema falsely stated during his campaign ahead of the August general election that Zambia's gross international reserves had reached US\$6.5 billion, arguing that the reserves "do not exist".

What did MakaanDay check?

MakaanDay examined two questions:

- Did Zambia's gross international reserves reach US\$6.5 billion?
- Is there credible evidence supporting the reported reserve figures?

What are gross international reserves?

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), gross international reserves are external assets that are readily available to and controlled by a country's monetary authorities, usually the central bank. They are used to finance international payments, stabilise the exchange rate, maintain confidence in the economy and provide a buffer against external financial shocks.

Gross international reserves are one of the key indicators economists, investors and international lenders use to assess a country's external financial strength.

What the evidence shows

Evidence from the Bank of Zambia

The Bank of Zambia's May 2026 Monetary Policy Report states that favourable foreign exchange market conditions enabled the central bank to continue purchasing foreign currency during the first quarter of 2026.

According to the report, the Bank purchased US\$695.8 million, comprising:

- US\$289.7 million from mining taxes;

- US\$378.0 million from commercial banks, largely from Government securities proceeds; and
- US\$28.1 million through the Government Bond/Foreign Exchange Sales Programme.

The report states that these purchases, together with external inflows, "contributed to the sharp increase in gross international reserves to a historic high of USD6.5 billion in February".

Additional inflows included:

- US\$192.2 million from the IMF under the Extended Credit Facility;
- US\$59.0 million from the World Bank Group; and
- US\$43.0 million in non-tax receipts.

The Bank of Zambia further explains that although reserves reached a historic peak of US\$6.5 billion in February 2026, they later declined to US\$6.2 billion by the end of March 2026. Even after that decline, reserves remained approximately US\$700 million higher than the US\$5.5 billion recorded at the end of December 2025.

Independent verification

The IMF independently confirmed Zambia's strengthened reserve position following its staff mission to Zambia in May 2026.

The Fund stated:

"Gross international reserves have increased to US\$6.4 billion, equivalent to 4.4 months of prospective imports of goods and services."

Although the IMF reported US\$6.4 billion, compared with the Bank of Zambia's reported peak of US\$6.5 billion, the figures relate to different reporting dates rather than conflicting data. Both institutions independently reported that Zambia's reserves exceeded US\$6 billion during the period in question.

Verdict: False

The claim that Zambia's US\$6.5 billion in gross international reserves "does not exist" is false.

Evidence from both the Bank of Zambia and the International Monetary Fund shows that Zambia's gross international reserves reached a historic high of US\$6.5 billion in February 2026 before easing to US\$6.2 billion by the end of March 2026. The IMF subsequently reported reserves of US\$6.4 billion following its May 2026 staff mission.

MakaanDay found no publicly available evidence supporting the claim that Zambia's reported foreign reserves were fictitious or did not exist. Instead, independent evidence from Zambia's central bank and the IMF consistently shows that the country's international reserves stood at approximately US\$6.2 billion to US\$6.5 billion during the period under review.

Explainer: What do international reserves consist of?

According to the IMF, international reserves generally comprise:

- Foreign currency assets, including deposits and highly liquid government securities;
- Gold held by the central bank;
- Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) allocated by the IMF;
- A country's reserve position at the IMF; and
- Other qualifying liquid foreign assets.

Why are international reserves important?

International reserves help a country to:

- pay for imports and meet external debt obligations when foreign currency inflows are insufficient;
- stabilise the exchange rate through foreign exchange market intervention by the central bank;
- maintain confidence among investors and international lenders that the country can meet its international obligations; and
- cushion the economy against external shocks, including global financial crises, sudden capital outflows and sharp increases in import prices.

OPINION

Africa's World Cup Problem Is Bigger Than the Referees

The 2026 FIFA World Cup has now entered the quarter-final stage. When the tournament kicked off, Africa celebrated a historic milestone. For the first time, 10 African teams qualified for the World Cup, thanks to the tournament's expansion to 48 teams.

Those teams were Algeria, Cape Verde, DR Congo, Egypt, Ghana, Morocco, Senegal, South Africa, Tunisia and Côte d'Ivoire.

At the time of writing, Morocco is the only African team still in the competition. Whether the continent will still have a representative by the time this article is published remains to be seen.

As expected, there has been no shortage of explanations for why Africa's representation has dwindled. Some fans argue that match officials favour European and North American teams. Others point to questionable refereeing decisions, the influence of football's traditional powerhouses or even the commercial interests surrounding the global game.

Whether those claims hold merit is open to debate. But focusing solely on referees risks ignoring a much deeper problem—one that starts at home.

The uncomfortable truth is that many African governments have failed to make sustained, strategic investments in sports development.

Success at the World Cup is not built during the month-long tournament. It is built over decades through deliberate investment in grassroots football, youth academies, coaching education, sports science, modern stadiums, talent identification and competitive domestic leagues. Countries that consistently perform on the world stage have systems that nurture talent from childhood to the national team.

Africa's World Cup Problem Is Bigger Than the Referees Cont.....

In many African countries, football development remains largely dependent on individual talent rather than strong institutions. Young players often emerge despite the system, not because of it. Training facilities are inadequate, local leagues struggle financially, youth competitions are poorly organised and football associations are frequently distracted by governance disputes.

The result is predictable. African teams continue to produce world-class individual players who shine in Europe's top leagues, yet many national teams struggle to consistently compete with countries whose football ecosystems are better organised and better funded.

Morocco's success is not accidental. Their remarkable run to the semi-finals in Qatar in 2022 and now another deep run in 2026 reflects years of planning and investment. The country invested heavily in football infrastructure, built modern academies, strengthened youth development and created a clear pathway for talented players at home and abroad. Their achievements demonstrate what long-term planning can produce.

African governments often celebrate when their teams qualify for major tournaments, but qualification alone should no longer be the benchmark. With Africa now guaranteed more places at future World Cups, the conversation should shift from simply participating to genuinely competing for the trophy.

The continent possesses abundant football talent. What is missing is an equally strong commitment to developing that talent through sustainable investment.

It is easier to blame referees than to confront decades of underinvestment. But until African governments, football associations and the private sector treat sport as a strategic national investment rather than an occasional source of national pride, Africa's World Cup story may continue to follow the same script: a promising start, followed by an early exit.

Perhaps the question Africa should be asking is not whether the referees are fair, but whether we have done enough ourselves to deserve a place among football's true elite.

Part 1

Questions over vetting process as Lesotho signs M98bn Kobong deal

Sechaba Mokhethi

The company selected to develop what could become Lesotho's largest-ever foreign direct investment has a track record that raises important questions about the government's due diligence before signing a binding agreement with New-York- Convalt Energy.

The company denies wrongdoing, while the Lesotho government assures Basotho that proper checks were done before signing the deal.

The M98 billion (US\$6.2 billion) project, known as Project Kobong, promises 1,200 megawatts of hydropower generation and an integrated AI data centre that would position Lesotho as a regional energy exporter.

But has Convalt Energy, the company selected for the project, ever delivered a project like this?

MNN put detailed questions to both Convalt and the Lesotho government about the company's track record, previous litigation and the safeguards protecting Lesotho should the project fail. Both rejected suggestions that the agreement exposes the country to undue risk.

Convalt founder and chief executive Hari Achuthan told MNN that the company's management team had structured and executed transactions worth more than US\$30 billion during their careers. He also said Convalt had "developed landmark renewable energy projects, including one of the largest solar projects in Southeast Asia."

When MNN asked whether he was referring to the Mandalay Solar Project, which is listed on Convalt's website as a US\$250 million investment in Southeast Asia, Achuthan did not respond. But his advisor, Victoria Harmon of VL Harmon Advisors, later confirmed that Achuthan referred to Mandalay.

MNN reviewed the ten power-generation projects listed on Convalt's website. Eight, including Kobong, are described as "under development", one as "operating" and one as "sold". MNN then asked Achuthan whether Convalt had completed a project comparable in scale, complexity or value to Project Kobong. He did not answer.

Convalt's legal history court documents filed in New York reveal that Convalt and its founder, president and CEO, Hari Achuthan, were previously named in a civil lawsuit alleging their involvement in a scheme involving stolen bitcoin miners and millions of dollars in cryptocurrency proceeds between 2020 and 2022. The allegations were never tested in court. In January 2023, New York Supreme Court Judge Richard Mott dismissed the claims against Achuthan and his two companies, Convalt and ACO Investment Group, after finding that the plaintiffs had failed to properly serve the court papers. As a result, the court never considered the evidence or ruled on whether the allegations were true.

Under Achuthan's leadership, Convalt Energy also defaulted on a \$1.05 million (M17.4 million) loan it took to finance a solar panel manufacturing plant near Watertown International Airport in northern New York. This plant was never built. See Part 2.

The lender sued. The case ended in a settlement under which Convalt agreed to pay US\$125,000, with a second payment due in November this year. Court papers filed by Convalt do not dispute that it defaulted on the loan.

The litigation

The lawsuit was filed in 2022 by MinedMap Inc. and Serenity Alpha LLC, two bitcoin mining companies in Nevada.

The two companies alleged that Michael Maranda, a New York businessman, and several associates fraudulently obtained 2,380 bitcoin miners, misappropriated a \$462,000 (M7.6 million) deposit intended for electricity costs, and mined more than \$12.4 million (M205 million) worth of bitcoin.

The complaint alleged that Achuthan had a broader business relationship with Maranda than simply providing services. It claimed that the two men jointly owned or established several companies connected to the dispute, including Northway Mining, RPNY Holdings and Rouses Point Data Centre.

While denying that Achuthan or his companies were involved in any fraud, court paper filed by Conway Attorneys did not dispute that Achuthan had business dealings with Maranda. Conway argued that there is no evidence that Achuthan or his companies knowingly received stolen bitcoin or participated in a conspiracy. He said many of the allegations were disputed and should not be accepted as fact.

He argued that the plaintiffs had "frivolously named additional defendants" simply because they had "done business with Northway or Maranda in any capacity within the last few years".

Those allegations are significant considering that the company has signed a binding memorandum of agreement with Lesotho's Ministry of Energy for Project Kobong.

Achuthan told MNN that Lesotho faced little financial risk because Project Kobong would be privately financed without government guarantees.

FACT CHECK | Two Claims by Charles Chanda Checked Cont...

“Convalt is assuming the project risk,” he said, adding that financing arrangements were being formalised and would be disclosed once the feasibility study had been completed.

How the alleged scheme worked

The MinedMap and Serenity Alpha complaint repeatedly refers to data-centre entities that the plaintiffs alleged were used to host and conceal their bitcoin miners.

The complaint also cites evidence from a Coinmint supervisor who allegedly told a witness that Maranda's bitcoin miners were being hosted under a variety of company names, including Hudson Data Center and Oswego Data.

These entities were, according to the complaint, allegedly used to disguise the true ownership of those bitcoin miners.

In their court filing, MinedMap and Serenity Alpha alleged that Michael Maranda formed companies with no legitimate business purpose to conceal bitcoin miners they claimed had been fraudulently taken from them and other third parties.

The allegations against Achuthan

They also alleged that Maranda transferred mining machines obtained from them to Achuthan and his companies, and that, between 2021 and the filing of the lawsuit, he transferred more than US\$100,000 to Achuthan, ACO Investment Group and Convalt. MinedMap and Serenity Alpha further alleged that Achuthan knew, or should have known, that Maranda's businesses were not legitimate.

Summarising the plaintiffs' case, Justice Richard Mott wrote that they alleged the Achuthan defendants had "received and profited from Plaintiffs' bitcoin which they knew had been fraudulently obtained by Settling Defendants under the guise of a bitcoin mining contract."

Justice Mott did not rule on the allegations. Instead, in January 2023, he dismissed the claims because the plaintiffs failed to serve the court papers within the required time.

As a result, the court never considered the evidence or decided whether the allegations were true.

Responding to MNN's questions, Achuthan said: "The claims against Convalt Energy and its affiliates were dismissed by the court, which correctly determined that our role was limited to that of a vendor and electrical service provider."

However, the judgment itself does not make that finding. It dismissed the claims on procedural grounds. It did not determine whether the allegations were true or false.

A \$3.8 million settlement, but not for Achuthan

In September 2022, MinedMap and Serenity Alpha settled their claims against Michael Maranda and several companies linked to him, including Northway Mining, Hudson Data Center, RPNY Holdings, Rouses Point Data Center and Oswego Data.

The settlement says the agreement was reached to avoid the cost and uncertainty of litigation and "shall not be deemed an admission of wrongdoing."

The agreement specifically excluded Achuthan, ACO Investment Group and Convalt Energy, allowing the lawsuit to continue against them. However, months later, Judge Richard Mott dismissed the claims against those three defendants on procedural grounds.

Was Convalt Energy vetted properly for Lesotho project?

Lesotho Principal Secretary Tankiso Phapano said government first engaged with Achuthan in Morocco last year before he submitted a proposal. This was scrutinised before Lesotho sent Convalt a letter of intent and later signed an agreement allowing the company to do feasibility studies.

Lesotho's Minister of Energy, Lejone Mpotjoane, told MNN that assessments of the proposed project extended beyond reviewing the written proposal.

According to the minister, Achuthan told government he had experience operating energy projects in Asia and was establishing solar panel manufacturing and a data centre in New Mexico. The minister said Lesotho's Chargé d'Affaires in Washington visited the New Mexico site to verify those claims.

Government was aware of the previous litigation against Convalt.

"Yes, we noted that Convalt was involved in some litigations in the USA. This is not abnormal in businesses, and we asked him. He explained what transpired and that the issue is now closed," said Mpotjoane who stressed that Lesotho was not putting any money into the Kobong project which limits Lesotho's financial exposure.

"Convalt, he added, has also been given milestones to meet and the memorandum of agreement would become "null and void" if those were not achieved. The minister added that construction would not begin before feasibility studies

had been concluded and implementation agreements, including water-use plans, had been concluded.

Meanwhile, the United States Embassy spokesperson, Jessica Tosoriero, also confirmed that the embassy helped Convalt secure introductions to the Lesotho government.

Following MNN's meeting with the embassy, it posted on Facebook that Convalt had completed pre-feasibility studies, was accelerating work on the final feasibility study and was assembling a consortium of banks to finance the project.

It added: "Unlike others, U.S. companies build on solid foundations with proper research and planning. This is how U.S. companies deliver what they promise, and benefit the people and places where they operate."

MNN has since learned that the embassy only aimed to promote US business overseas. Due diligence was not their role.

Part 2

The flagship factory that was never built: Convalt's M17m US loan ends in settlement

Sechaba Mokhethi

Court records and public contracts from New York show that Convalt Energy's previous flagship manufacturing project never materialised despite receiving public funding and government support.

For nearly five years (2021 to 2026), Convalt Energy promoted plans to build a major solar panel manufacturing complex near Watertown International Airport in northern New York. Local authorities backed the venture with public land, development rights, infrastructure support and a \$1.05 million (about M17.4 million) loan.

But the factory was never built and the project

ultimately ended in a loan default, a lawsuit against Convalt Energy and its founder, president and CEO Hari Achuthan, and a settlement requiring the company to repay public funds.

The failed solar manufacturing venture raises questions about Convalt's track record as it pursues what would be the largest foreign direct investment in Lesotho's history.

A flagship manufacturing project

On 15 September 2021, Convalt Energy signed a Land Development Agreement with the Jefferson County Industrial Development Agency (JCIDA), a public economic development body in New York State.

The flagship factory that was never built: Convalt's M17m US loan ends in settlement cont...

The agreement gave Convalt rights to develop approximately 88 acres of publicly owned land near Watertown International Airport. According to the agreement, the company proposed a phased development of an "up to 500,000 square foot manufacturing facility" for solar panel manufacturing and solar power generation.

The plans included manufacturing buildings, energy-generation facilities, parking areas, stormwater systems and utility improvements.

As the project advanced, JCIDA granted Convalt an exclusive option to acquire the land, together with access rights for engineering studies and project planning. By November 2022, the agency had amended the agreement to allow preliminary site preparation work, including clearing, grading and other construction-related activities before the project formally closed.

The project was being promoted as a major manufacturing investment that would help establish a domestic solar supply chain in the United States.

Public loan support

In July 2022, JCIDA provided Convalt with a US\$1.05 million loan to help finance the project.

A series of agreements signed on 12 July 2022, including a loan agreement and promissory note, required Convalt to repay the loan with interest at 3% per annum. The loan was due to mature on 12 May 2023, with monthly interest payments due before the principal became payable.

JCIDA did not rely solely on Convalt's promise to repay. Under a security agreement, it obtained a first-priority security interest over Convalt's assets, including equipment, inventory, accounts, intellectual property and future business assets.

JCIDA also required additional guarantees. Achuthan personally guaranteed the loan, while Convalt Manufacturing LLC and ACO Investment Group LLC signed unconditional guarantees undertaking to repay the debt if Convalt Energy failed to do so.

The extensive security arrangements suggest that JCIDA considered the loan significant enough to require both personal and corporate guarantees.

The factory that never came

Despite the agreements, land access and public financing, the manufacturing facility never materialised. The project had originally envisaged construction of an approximately 300,000-square-foot factory on the Hounsfeld site.

Years later, it remained unbuilt.

According to a June 2026 report by the Watertown Daily Times, Convalt Energy ultimately defaulted on the JCIDA loan "after failing to build the 300,000-square-foot plant on the Route 12F site in the town of Hounsfeld."

Instead of overseeing a completed manufacturing complex, local authorities found themselves pursuing repayment of public funds.

MNN asked Achuthan why the loan had not been repaid earlier and what led to the default.

He did not directly answer those questions, saying only that: "the project did not advance as planned due to state and county incentive commitments that were ultimately not delivered... circumstances outside Convalt's control".

The dispute soon escalated into formal legal action.

Default notice

The breakdown of the relationship became public in October 2024.

On 3 October 2024, Justin S. Miller, an attorney acting for JCIDA, sent Achuthan a formal "Notice of Default, Expiration and Demand."

The agency informed Achuthan that Convalt had failed to make required payments for August, September and October 2024, totalling \$7,875. "Please also accept this letter as a notice of default and demand," JCIDA's attorneys wrote.

JCIDA warned that late charges would be imposed and that, unless the arrears and outstanding balances were paid, the loan would accelerate at a default interest rate of 10% until paid in full.

The agency also notified Convalt that its rights under the land development agreement would expire on 1 November 2024.

Lawsuit follows

Four months later, on 10 February 2025, JCIDA filed suit in New York Supreme Court against Convalt Energy, Convalt Manufacturing LLC, ACO Investment Group LLC and Hari Achuthan.

The complaint alleged that the defendants had failed to repay the public loan and sought recovery of outstanding amounts due under the various loan documents.

The lawsuit brought together the web of agreements executed in July 2022, including the promissory note, security agreement, guarantees and financing statements.

Convalt did not simply concede the claims.

In the defendants' May 2025 answer and counterclaims, the company and its co-defendants denied many of JCIDA's allegations and disputed aspects of the agency's claims.

Their attorneys repeatedly stated that documents referenced in the complaint "speak for themselves" and denied wrongdoing that could be inferred from the allegations.

The court filings show that the dispute remained active throughout much of 2025 and into 2026.

Despite the red flags, Achuthan has assured MNN that "this matter has no bearing whatsoever on our ability to finance or execute Project Kobong".

Settlement negotiations

By March 2026, both parties were already informing the court that settlement discussions were underway.

In a settlement status letter to Justice William Ramseier dated 17 March 2026, Convalt's attorneys wrote that the parties had been "negotiating a settlement in good faith" and were reviewing a proposed settlement agreement.

A month later, on 15 April 2026, both sides told the court they were "close to resolving this matter" and requested additional time to finalise the deal.

The dispute ultimately resulted in a repayment arrangement.

According to the Watertown Daily Times, Convalt and JCIDA agreed a settlement package under which the company would repay the defaulted \$1.05 million loan. The paper reported that JCIDA received an initial payment of \$125,000, with a second instalment due in November this year.

Responding to MNN, Achuthan said: "We reached an amicable settlement with JCIDA, have made our initial payment, and are fulfilling our remaining obligations on schedule."

Despite reports that the project never happened and the site remains "shovel-ready with a large pad to build on and sewer and water already available", Achuthan said Convalt invested more than \$5.5 million of its own capital into that site. MNN could not independently verify this claim.

Case discontinued

On 8 June 2026, the parties formally ended the litigation, four days after signing an agreement with Lesotho.

A stipulation of discontinuance filed in Jefferson County Supreme Court states that the lawsuit was discontinued with prejudice and without costs to either party.

The filing indicates that the dispute was resolved, although the settlement terms themselves were not included in the court documents reviewed by MNN Centre for Investigative Journalism.

Importantly, the discontinuance does not change the central facts documented by the case.

Convalt received public support, development rights and a \$1.05 million publicly backed loan to help advance a major solar manufacturing project. The planned factory was never built, the loan went into default, and local authorities ultimately sued to recover the money before reaching a settlement.

COURT WATCH | Court Allows Missing ZAMMSA Investigation Report Pages as Trial Continues

By Linda Soko Tembo

The Economic and Financial Crimes Court has allowed prosecutors to introduce previously missing pages of a key internal Zambia Medicines and Medical Supplies Agency (ZAMMSA) investigation report, rejecting defence objections that the documents should be excluded from evidence in the corruption trial of four former senior officials.

The additional pages form part of an internal report examining procurement decisions that underpin several allegations in the prosecution's case.

The accused are former ZAMMSA Director General Victor Nyasulu, former Director of Supply Planning Nalishhebo Siyandi, former Director of Procurement Habadu Nchimunya, and former Ministry of Health official Dr John Kachimba. All four have pleaded not guilty to corruption-related charges arising from ZAMMSA's 2023–2024 emergency mop-up procurement of medicines and medical supplies.

The ruling followed testimony by ZAMMSA Director of Internal Controls Vivian Mupunda, who told the court that several pages of an internal investigation report she prepared could not initially be traced but were later recovered with the assistance of auditors.

State prosecutor Gracilia Mulenga applied for leave under Rule 5(6) of the Criminal Procedure Code (Economic and Financial Crimes Court) Rules, 2024, to disclose the recovered pages, arguing that they were unavailable when the prosecution filed its documentary evidence. The rule allows the court to admit additional evidence before the prosecution closes its case where the material was unavailable at the time of the original disclosure, provided the defence is given an opportunity to examine it.

Lawyers representing the four accused opposed the application, arguing that the prosecution had failed to demonstrate that the documents

were genuinely unavailable at the time of disclosure and that admitting them during the trial would prejudice the defence and undermine the disclosure rules governing criminal proceedings.

Magistrate Peter Mungala dismissed the objection and granted the prosecution leave to disclose the additional pages, allowing them to form part of the evidence before the court.

Earlier in her testimony, Mupunda told the court that although she sits as an observer on ZAMMSA's Management Procurement Committee (MPC), she neither participates in decision-making nor votes on procurement matters.

She said that during the 2023–2024 mop-up procurement exercise, then Director General Nyasulu directed the Internal Controls Department to coordinate a due diligence exercise after raising concerns that some suppliers recommended for contract awards were expected to deliver medicines within "ex-stock to six weeks," despite the procurement being intended to address an urgent national shortage of medicines.

Teams comprising procurement officers, pharmacists, accountants and internal auditors were tasked with verifying suppliers' stock holdings. According to Mupunda, the exercise found that some suppliers could not confirm they held the medicines they had bid to supply, while others appeared to rely on the same stock as competing bidders. Investigators also noted significant price differences for similar products, with some quotations exceeding the Zambia Public Procurement Authority market price index.

Mupunda said that while compiling her report she requested procurement records, including an earlier due diligence report, but was instead provided with what she described as an unsigned evaluation report and a checklist lacking sufficient detail.

She further told the court that an earlier procurement paper recorded Lumumba Pharmaceuticals as having failed to submit a bid, but that the company later appeared among suppliers recommended for contract awards.

She also identified differences between two procurement committee papers, including revised budget figures which, in her view, made procurement prices appear to fall within the permissible procurement threshold.

Turning to a separate investigation into the procurement of cholera commodities, Mupunda told the court that in January 2025 her office received a whistleblowing complaint from Jean Chongo, who alleged that her name had been included on an evaluation report despite not participating in the evaluation process.

Following the complaint, Mupunda said she obtained procurement documents relating to ZPC Paper No. 99 of March 2024, valued at approximately K16.8 million, under which contracts were awarded to Yash Pharmacy, Cube Pharmaceutical and VL Healthnet Services.

According to her testimony, the review identified several irregularities, including purchase orders exceeding K1 million contrary to public procurement rules and delivery records indicating that Cube Pharmaceutical supplied goods before the Procurement Committee approved the procurement process.

She further told the court that three ZAMMSA employees, Chongo, Lola Nambela and Mundia Sianga,

all denied serving on the evaluation committee despite their names appearing on procurement documents.

Mupunda also testified that investigators reviewed electronic communications between procurement officers Chanda Napanje and Siphon Banda. The emails, she said, indicated that some quotations were submitted after goods had already been delivered and included internal discussions raising concerns over unbudgeted products, evaluator names and altered budget figures.

According to Mupunda, the investigation concluded that budget amounts had been revised to fit the allowable procurement threshold. She compiled a report and submitted it to the office of the then Director General, Dr John Kachimba, who instructed that the matter be referred to the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and the Drug Enforcement Commission (DEC).

She told the court that during the investigations, DEC officers observed that several pages were missing from her report and requested a complete copy. Mupunda said she was initially unable to locate the outstanding pages, including on her laptop, but auditors assisting with the investigation later recovered them in June 2026.

Magistrate Mungala adjourned the matter to August 26, 27 and 28, 2026, to allow the defence to examine the newly disclosed documents before proceedings continue. Police bond for all four accused was extended.



This week in the Bulletin & Record

KK, his old Chevy, and how Bobby has saved it from the scrapyard.

Years ago, on the campaign trail for the United National Independence Party (UNIP), first republican President Kenneth Kaunda was an itinerant traveller and electoral campaigner in the run-up to Zambia's independence in 1964. He used a variety of vehicles of all manner and shapes, including his official 1950s Land Rover currently parked outside the former President's old Chilenje house, now a national heritage monument.

One such vehicle is a rare six-cylinder 1960 horizon blue Chevy Kingwood Bel Air station wagon, given to KK as a gift from the Americans and sold at the last count to the Lusaka-based Tandika family.

The Kingswood station wagon was essentially the mini-van of the 1960's, and came in either six or eight cylinders. It had the addition of a third seat that faced the rear of the car, and the seat was stowed away in the floor in the area where the spare tyre was normally stored. The spare tyre was instead stored inside the passenger side quarter panel.

Parked and abandoned for close to 30 years, the car has recently re-surfaced, and is about to get a complete overhaul that will see it restored to its pristine condition when its current owner, Bobby Van der Merwe, puts it back on the road as part of his collection of classic cars.

Bobby, a car enthusiast who grew up in Zambia, attending Silver Rest Primary school near Lusaka's Barn Motel, and later, Gilbert Rennie's Boys' High School (now Kabulonga Boys), is formerly general manager of Star Motors and later, Power Equipment.

From his workshop office at Macfarlane's Truck & Car Limited along Lusaka's Lumumba Road, he told the B&R that he's part of a classic car club whose members meet once a month for a spin around Lusaka and its environs.

"It's a fun thing. We get together every month informally. We're not an association or anything like that, so

anybody is free to join in, as long as they have an interest in classic cars and mechanics," he said.

According to Bobby, a lot of historic cars are lying around all over the country, such as Chevrolet Biscaynes and Impalas, which were senior ministerial cars

at the time of Zambia's independence in 1964 while the Biscaynes were given to Ministers of State (now Deputy Ministers).

Bobby says it's a shame that these cars have been abandoned, and made from solid sheet metal and steel, they have "almost all been cut up

and sold as scrap metal for scrap metal export and smelting at Kafue's scrap metal iron works."

JOHN MUKELA

This story was first published in the July 2013 edition of the Bulletin and Record Magazine



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Clockwise from top: The Chevy waiting in line for restoration; Bobby Van der Merwe in his office; the Chevy how it should look



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