

# INAUGURAL SPEECH

FIRST DAY AS VICE-CHANCELLOR OF  
NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY



DELIVERED BY

**PROF. BENARD I. ODOH,**  
VICE-CHANCELLOR,  
NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY, AWKA.

NOVEMBER 5, 2024  
POSTGRADUATE COLLEGE AUDITORIUM





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# CITATION

OF

## PROF. BENARD IFEANYI ODOH

**P**rofessor Odoh was born on 5th August 1975. He hails from Ezza North LGA, Ebonyi State. He was a member of the Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU) Senate from 2010 to 2014 and served as Special Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor (Academic Matters I) and Coordinator of the UTME Exercise from June to October 2014.

Odoh was appointed as a professor at the Federal University Gusau in 2015.


He has also served as the Secretary to the State Government (SSG) of Ebonyi State and has over 120 research publications in reputable international journals, e-books, and monographs.

He returned to Nnamdi Azikiwe University in 2019 after resigning as Secretary to the Ebonyi State Government.

He has been a Board Member of the Nnamdi Azikiwe University Confucius Institute and a member of the Admission and Examination Monitoring Committee.

He also served as Director of the Center for Water Resources Capacity Building Network for the Southeast Zone from August 2010 to October 2014 and as Coordinator of the UNIZIK Seismic Observatory Station during the same period.

### MEMBERSHIP OF LEARNED SOCIETIES

- ◆ Member, Society of Exploration Geophysics, Oklahoma USA No. 157438
  - ◆ Member, American Association of Petroleum Geologist No. 10036283.
  - ◆ Member, European Association of Geoscientists & Engineers  
No. M2012-2644 20
  - ◆ Member, Nigeria Association of Petroleum Explorationist No. AC07/5074
  - ◆ Member, Nigerian Mining and Geosciences Society No. C-08-3681
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### **Protocol:**

Good day, distinguished faculty, staff, students, and honored guests.

### **1.0 Introduction and Background**

It is with profound gratitude to God and a deep sense of responsibility that I stand before you today as the newly appointed Vice-Chancellor of Nnamdi Azikiwe University. I extend my heartfelt appreciation to the Governing Council for the trust they have placed in me by entrusting me with this esteemed and sensitive role. I also express my sincere gratitude to the Minister of Education and all other stakeholders whose support has been instrumental at this critical juncture in our university's history. To my respected colleagues who also vied for this position, I salute your courage and camaraderie; your participation has enriched the process and underscored the collective commitment to our institution's excellence. This appointment reaffirms the Governing Council's role as the highest administrative body and employer within the university system, prioritizing the university's interests above all. Thank you for your unwavering support, especially when this institution needed it most. Together, we will face the challenges and opportunities ahead with a commitment to excellence. I sincerely appreciate the roles played by the entire university community, including the senate, congregation, convocation, and trade unions, whose contributions have enhanced and validated my emergence as Vice-Chancellor.

We have all, collectively and individually, played meaningful roles in this process. Thank you for your unwavering support and dedication, especially when this great institution needed it most. Together, we will face the challenges and opportunities ahead with the commitment to excellence that our university embodies.

I have the conviction that the citing of this university in the ancient technological hub of Awka was for a reason. Furthermore, the decision to name it after the revered "Zik of Africa" was equally deliberate and symbolic, as it evokes the legacy, dreams, and aspirations of the great Nnamdi Azikiwe for Africa. We stand at a pivotal threshold of





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history beckoning us to chart a course that aligns with the Zikist vision of positioning Africa as a global leader in the arts, humanities, and allied sciences.

We are, therefore, in a moment of great significance for me as the Vice-Chancellor and the entire Nnamdi Azikiwe University community. We have an opportunity to harness the rich technological heritage of Awka and the visionary spirit of Nnamdi Azikiwe to propel our institution towards realizing his dreams for Africa. We must embrace this responsibility with a deep sense of purpose, commitment, and unwavering dedication. As we embark on this journey, let our guide be the principles and ideals Nnamdi Azikiwe championed – a relentless pursuit of excellence, a steadfast commitment to innovation, and an unwavering belief in the transformative power of education. Together, we will build upon the foundation laid by our esteemed namesake and strive to make Nnamdi Azikiwe University a beacon of progress, a hub of knowledge, and a catalyst for the advancement of Africa.

Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, permit me to congratulate my immediate predecessor, the outgone Acting Vice Chancellor of this towering citadel, **Prof. Carol Arinze-Umobi** and all the members of the Governing Council (past and current), on the enigmatic success achieved in transforming Nnamdi Azikiwe University from its infantile cradle to the elitist ivy it has become today. Nnamdi Azikiwe University has truly become an envy of academics, the pride of the Southeast and indeed, Nigeria; a center of academic excellence and best among equals. The university has evolved over the decades to become unrivalled in academic research and leadership development. This is so both in originality and creativity, thus keeping faith with the ideals of the colossus after whom the university derives its name: **The Great Zik of Africa**, who once said, **“Originality is the essence of true scholarship. Creativity is the soul of the true scholar”**.

### 2.0 Why This Vision Matters Now More Than Ever

As we embark on this new chapter in the life of our esteemed institution, excitement and a profound sense of responsibility overwhelm me. This "Day One" of our





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administration's tenure marks not just a transition but a transformation—an opportunity to redefine and elevate Nnamdi Azikiwe University's role in shaping the future of education in Nigeria and beyond.

Our vision for NAU is both ambitious and imperative. We stand at the threshold of a rapidly evolving global landscape where the convergence of technology, innovation, and human ingenuity reshapes every facet of society. In this context, our mission transcends traditional academic boundaries; we must become a beacon of forward-thinking education, a crucible of innovation, and a catalyst for societal progress. Central to our vision is the commitment to nurturing graduates who are not just jobseekers, job creators and problem-solvers but global entrepreneurs. In a world where the careers of tomorrow are yet to be conceived, we must equip our students with adaptability, critical thinking, and entrepreneurial spirit to thrive in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). Hence, we will reimagine and reengineer our curriculum, foster interdisciplinary collaboration, and cultivate a lifelong learning culture.

The urgency of our mission is underscored by Nigeria's pressing socioeconomic challenges. With youth unemployment exceeding 53%, we are responsible for bridging the chasm between education and opportunity. NAU must evolve into a powerhouse of innovation, where industry-relevant skills are honed, research addresses real-world problems, and seeds of economic stability and self-reliance are sown. Our commitment to academic excellence remains unwavering, but we must broaden our definition of excellence to encompass impact, relevance, and societal transformation. We will forge stronger partnerships with industry, government, and communities, ensuring that our research and educational programs directly contribute to national development goals.

As we chart this course, we draw inspiration from our namesake, the great Nnamdi Azikiwe, whose vision for Africa was progress, unity, and global leadership. Let us honour his legacy by making NAU a crucible of African innovation and a model for educational institutions worldwide. This journey will require our entire university community's collective effort, creativity, and dedication. Together, we will build an institution that not only adapts to the future but shapes it - an NAU that stands as a testament to the power of education to transform lives and societies.





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As we enter this new era, let us do so with courage, optimism, and an unwavering commitment to excellence. The challenges before us are significant, but so are the opportunities. Let us seize this moment to redefine what is possible in higher education and create a legacy that will inspire future generations.

### **3.0 Engaging Our Alumni**

Today, I want to address a vital resource at our disposal—our alumni. Our alumni network is not just a collection of individuals who have passed through our halls; it is a vibrant community of trailblazers, leaders, and innovators. The experiences, skills, and insights you have gained are invaluable assets that can greatly contribute to the growth and development of Nnamdi Azikiwe University.

I envision a university that actively engages its alumni in meaningful ways. Together, we can harness this immense resource. We will create structured mentorship programs connecting students with alumni in their fields of interest, providing guidance and real-world insights. By encouraging alumni to collaborate with faculty and students on research and community initiatives, we can leverage their expertise to tackle pressing societal issues. Alumni contributions, whether financial or in-kind, can enhance our facilities, invest in technology, and provide scholarships for deserving students. We will establish robust networking platforms to facilitate job placements, internships, and career advice, helping our graduates to transition smoothly into the workforce. Strengthening our alumni associations will create a sense of belonging and community, providing a platform for sharing experiences and fostering lifelong connections.

As your Vice-Chancellor, I am committed to building a strong, collaborative relationship with our alumni. I invite each of you to actively participate in this journey. Together, we can create programs and initiatives that enhance our university's reputation and enrich the lives of current and future students.







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### 4.0 The Fourth Industrial Revolution: An Unparalleled Opportunity

As previously stated, the Fourth Industrial Revolution presents a unique chance for NAU to become a national leader in cutting-edge education. Technologies such as **AI, data science, blockchain, and robotics** are transforming industries, and Nigeria's youth stand ready to seize these opportunities with the proper training. As global projections for the digital economy exceed \$11.5 trillion by 2027, NAU will strive to prepare our graduates for this dynamic landscape, ensuring they are equipped to contribute to Nigeria's growth in the global economy.

### 5.0 Vision: Shaping NAU for the Future


Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, may I at this juncture state my vision for UNIZIK within the next five years. I am committed to establishing NAU among the **top 50 universities in Africa** while we reshape and reposition the university to contest for a position in the first 500 universities in the global ranking of universities through the **Disruptive Development Model (2024-2029)** - a strategic framework to boost academic quality, innovation, and global competitiveness. To achieve this, we will pursue the following goals:

#### I. Establish Centre for Raw Materials Development and Beneficiation:

This will:

- ◆ Develop Industry-Ready Graduates
- ◆ Enhance Research and Development (R&D).
- ◆ Establish a Centre for Raw Materials Development and Beneficiation
- ◆ Create digital Transformation of Administrative Processes.
- ◆ Strengthen Industry Partnerships.
- ◆ Sustain Growth and Diversified Funding Sources.

#### II. Enhance Academic Excellence

- ◆ Regularly update academic programs to align with global standards and market needs.
  - ◆ Increase funding for research initiatives and encourage faculty to pursue grant opportunities.
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- ◆ Promote interdisciplinary studies to foster innovation and collaboration.

### **III. Strengthen Faculty Development**

- ◆ Attract and retain high-calibre faculty members through competitive salaries and benefits.
- ◆ Implement ongoing training and development programs for faculty to enhance teaching and research capabilities.

### **IV. Improve Infrastructure**

- ◆ Invest in state-of-the-art laboratories, libraries, and technology to support learning and research.
- ◆ Enhance online learning platforms and integrate technology into the curriculum.

### **V. Enhance Student Experience**

- ◆ Provide comprehensive support services, including counseling, career services, and mentorship programs.
- ◆ Foster a vibrant campus life through clubs, societies, and cultural programs.


### **VI. Promote Research and Innovation**

- ◆ Establish specialized research centres that focus on key areas relevant to Africa's development.
- ◆ Collaborate with industries and other universities for joint research projects and knowledge exchange.

### **VII. Establish International Collaborations**

- ◆ Develop student and faculty exchange programs with leading global universities.
- ◆ Host and participate in international academic conferences to enhance visibility and networking.

### **VII. Enhance Community Engagement**

- ◆ Integrate community service into the curriculum to foster social responsibility among students.
  - ◆ Collaborate with local businesses and NGOs to address community needs and promote sustainability.
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### IX. Aggressive Marketing and Branding

- ◆ Launch campaigns to highlight UNIZIK's achievements, programs, and research initiatives.
- ◆ Utilize social media platforms to engage with prospective students and alumni.

### X. Focus on Alumni Relations

- ◆ Strengthen the alumni network to facilitate mentorship and career opportunities for current students.
- ◆ Encourage alumni to contribute to the university through donations and partnerships.

### XI. Measure and Evaluate Progress

- ◆ Establish KPIs to monitor progress toward strategic goals.
- ◆ Conduct annual reviews to assess the effectiveness of implemented strategies and make necessary adjustments.

## 6.0 Key Projects and Strategic Initiatives

The roadmap includes 11 core projects, and each project will be overseen by one of our implementation committees:

- Vice Chancellor's Residence** – Completion by June 2026. This will enhance administrative functions, foster role model presence, strengthen University culture and community engagement.
- Staff and Student Hostel Complex** - Operational by 2027 for 5,000 students and at least 50 staff. This will offer affordable housing to improve staff and student life and attract enrollments.
- Tech Innovation Hub** – Launch in mid-2025 to support studies in AI, robotics, and other emerging fields.
- 18-Hole Golf Course** - Scheduled to open in 2028, expected to generate ₦200 million annually and develop recreational facilities and leverage on professional network for students and the community, while generating revenue.






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- E. **Greenhouse Farming Project** – Expected revenue of ₦50 million by 2027, promoting sustainable agriculture.
- F. **150-Room Hotel** with Events and Meeting Rooms to **provide comfort and security to visitors to the university and its environs** through accommodation and conference services.
- G. **Comprehensive Online Digital Course Platform:** To digitize teaching and learning and offer diverse courses with flexible learning paths, interactive content, and personalized progress tracking.
- H. **Implementation of Coordinated Renewable Energy Solutions /Institution of N100 million quasi-endowment fund to support research in Renewable Energy.** This will enhance Research & Development, patenting of renewable energy solutions, reduces the university's carbon footprint, earns carbon credits, taps into Intellectual Property Rights and promotes sustainability.
- I. **15 New Undergraduate Tech Programs. Purpose:** This will increase graduate employability and industry-relevance while projecting Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka to take its position as one of the top 50 global path-finding institutions in Africa.
- J. **Campus Landscaping and Beautification.** This will enhance campus aesthetics and improve the health, well-being and learning of inhabitants on campus.
- K. **Rehabilitation and Construction of Campus Roads.** This will ensure safe and efficient access across the campus and support inclusivity, accessibility and campus safety.

### 7.0 Immediate Action Plan: Formation of Implementation Committees

To begin this ambitious journey, we will immediately constitute dedicated implementation committees for each of our core objectives. These committees, comprising faculty experts, student representatives, and industry stakeholders, will ensure that our plans translate into action. Each committee will focus on one strategic goal, overseeing project timelines, reporting milestones, and addressing challenges promptly.





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The committees will include:

- i. **Industry-Readiness Program Development Committee** – Focused on developing new programs aligned with market demands.
- ii. **Research and Innovation Committee** – To accelerate our R&D agenda, particularly in the fields of medical technology, renewable energy, and agritech.
- iii. **Digital Transformation Committee** – Dedicated to streamlining our administrative processes and enhancing student services.
- iv. **Infrastructure and Campus Development Committee** – To oversee construction and modernization projects like road construction, the Student and Staff Hostel Complex and Tech Innovation Hub.
- v. **Funding and Partnership Committee** – Responsible for forging strategic partnerships, including PPPs, and mobilizing grants.

These committees will meet periodically and provide **quarterly progress reports** to ensure accountability and transparency. This step signals our commitment to immediate and impactful actions


### 8.0 Financial Strategy

We estimate a **₦70 billion** investment for these initiatives over the next five years, with funding from tuition, partnerships, and grants. Our **Funding and Partnership Committee** will prioritize:

**Public-Private Partnerships (PPP):** Raising ₦10 billion by co-funding critical infrastructure and Corporate Social Responsibility

**International and Domestic Grants:** Targeting ₦5 billion in grants by 2028 through strategic collaborations.

**Government Interventions:**

- ◆ Direct subventions
  - ◆ TETFund interventions
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### **9.0 Monitoring and Evaluation**

To ensure accountability, quarterly progress reports will evaluate project milestones and university goals, while annual stakeholder engagements will foster transparency and strengthen community involvement.

### **10. Immediate Commitment to On-Campus Leadership**


To drive this transformation effectively, I will be on a permanent residence on campus within six weeks of my assumption of office. Establishing a continuous, 24/7 leadership presence on campus is not just a symbolic gesture but a strategic decision to remain closely connected to the day-to-day pulse of the university.

Being on the locus allows me to engage with students, faculty, and staff more directly, understand their concerns and aspirations firsthand, and respond quickly to any challenges. This close-knit leadership approach will foster a culture of transparency, accessibility, and mutual respect - key values for any thriving academic community. Additionally, my presence on campus will allow me to oversee and accelerate the initiatives we are setting in motion, ensuring that they are implemented swiftly and that we maintain momentum toward our ambitious goals.

With a constant leadership presence, I am committed to bridging the gaps between administration and the university community, enhancing communication, trust, and accountability, which are critical to our collective growth and success.

### **11. Addressing Campus Security and Infrastructure**

Currently, our campus faces significant security challenges that have impacted both the safety of our community and the university assets as well as the integrity of the university. Over time, nearly all valuable assets on campus have been subject to vandalism, and part of the perimeter fence that once safeguarded our grounds has collapsed. This security breach has led to severe risks for our students and staff, educational environment, and university facilities. In addition, critical infrastructure, such as the 2MW solar farm, has been vandalized, limiting our capacity to provide reliable electricity and affecting operations and safety.





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To address these pressing issues, I am implementing a multi-faceted security and infrastructure plan that will revitalize, reassure, restore safety on campus, and support our new vision:

- ◆ **Emergency Security Response Team**

We will establish an Emergency Security Response Team tasked with responding swiftly to any security threats on campus. This team will be equipped with trained personnel, modern surveillance technology, and rapid-response protocols to ensure the safety of everyone on campus. Their presence will provide a proactive layer of security, deterring potential threats and protecting university assets.

- ◆ **Reactivation of the 2MW Solar Farm**

As part of our commitment to sustainable infrastructure and reliable power, we will restore the vandalized 2MW solar farm, providing a stable, eco-friendly power source for campus facilities. This reactivation is essential for enhancing security, especially at night, and reducing our reliance on the grid, which is often inconsistent.

- ◆ **Installation of 6km Internal Street Lighting**


To improve security and enhance campus life, we will install 6 kilometers of internal street lighting along main thoroughfares, creating a safer environment for students, faculty, and staff during evening hours. These lights will brighten our campus, support a vibrant nightlife, and mitigate the risks associated with an unlit campus.

- ◆ **Perimeter Ring Road and Fence Reconstruction**

Securing the boundaries of our campus is a priority. We will construct a perimeter ring road to enable efficient monitoring of campus borders and facilitate rapid response to any incidents at the edge of our grounds. In tandem, we will rebuild the perimeter fence to re-establish a physical barrier that safeguards the campus from external threats.

- ◆ **Campus Beautification and Road Rehabilitation**

A secure campus fosters pride and belonging. We will embark on a campus beautification project to enhance the landscape and create an inviting environment that reflects our commitment to excellence. Additionally, existing campus roads will





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be rehabilitated to improve access, safety, and aesthetics, providing a more enjoyable experience for everyone.

- ◆ **Creation of a New Campus Ecosystem for Strategic Initiatives**

Our vision for NAU includes the creation of a new campus ecosystem, a dedicated zone that will host the innovative programs and centres that are part of our growth strategy. This ecosystem will be a hub for new initiatives, such as the Tech Innovation Hub and the Centre for Raw Materials Development and Beneficiation, supporting cross-disciplinary collaboration, entrepreneurship, and research.


- ◆ **Enhancing Workforce Motivation and Ensuring Accountability**

To build a thriving and productive university community, we acknowledge the crucial role of creating an environment that rewards excellence and upholds the highest standards of conduct and integrity. Our administration is committed to implementing a comprehensive system of incentives designed to motivate our staff and faculty, encouraging optimal performance and innovation.

These incentives will be tailored to recognize and reward dedication, innovation, and excellence, ensuring that all contributors to our university's mission feel valued and appreciated. This approach includes various forms of recognition, such as awards ceremonies, feature articles in departmental blogs, and other rewards that align with intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, fostering an environment where achievement is highly valued.

However, it is equally important to establish clear expectations and a robust system of accountability alongside these incentives. While we are dedicated to supporting the growth and development of our staff and faculty and rewarding outstanding contributions, we will not tolerate indiscipline or unethical behaviour. A structured accountability system will be implemented, outlining defined consequences for actions that compromise the university's integrity, reputation, or security.

In line with this approach, we appeal to all staff and faculty for their cooperation and commitment to upholding our university's standards. Together, we can foster a culture where positive actions and peak performance are recognized and rewarded, and where integrity, respect, and inclusivity form the foundation of our community. This culture will







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be supported by broad-based representation, collaborative environments, and community support, ensuring everyone can contribute and thrive.

With your collective support, we aim to build a university that is an exemplary workplace and a respected institution for higher learning, known for its commitment to academic excellence, innovation, and the well-being of its entire community. Let us work together to create an environment where everyone can reach their highest academic and professional potential and where our institution stands as a model of excellence and integrity.


### 12. **Stimulating Research and Innovation through the NAU Annual Quasi-Endowment Fund**

In our commitment to driving research excellence and fostering innovation that directly serves market needs, we will establish a **₦100 million annual quasi-endowment fund**. This fund will serve as a catalyst, empowering prepared and willing faculty to embark on impactful research projects that address pressing market demands. Through this initiative, we aim to position NAU as a leader in applied research that contributes to Nigeria's economic development and global competitiveness.

In addition to supporting market-oriented research, this fund will be directed towards initiatives that promote a culture of integration and diversity within our university community, supporting ideas and projects fostering inclusivity, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and cultural understanding. We will cultivate an environment that celebrates diverse perspectives and encourages meaningful partnerships across all sectors of our academic community.

We aim to create a vibrant ecosystem where innovation thrives, diversity is valued, and research drives social and economic progress. This fund will be a powerful incentive for our faculty members to pursue groundbreaking work that resonates with industry needs and enhances our university's impact.

Through these combined efforts, we will create a safer, more dynamic, and attractive campus that supports the academic and social experiences of both our local and global communities. By restoring and revitalizing our security and infrastructure, we are laying





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the foundation for a future-ready university prioritizing safety, growth, and academic excellence. This will enhance the relevance and rating of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, in local and global communities.

### **Conclusion**

Our university is a vibrant tapestry of cultures, ideas, and aspirations. It is our duty to nurture this diversity, fostering an environment where every voice is heard, and every dream is pursued. Let us work hand in hand to create a community that inspires creativity, champions research, and embraces the transformative power of education.

In the coming days, I will reach out to each of you—faculty, students, and staff—to hear your thoughts and ideas. Together, we will build a strategic vision that reflects our shared values and aspirations. I am excited about the possibilities that lie ahead, and I invite you to join me in this endeavour.

Let us remember that our strength lies in our unity and our commitment to the greater good. Together, we can elevate UNIZIK to new heights, making it not just a centre of learning but a beacon of hope and a model for others to follow.

Thank you for your trust, your support, and your unwavering dedication to our university. The future is bright, and I am eager to walk this path with all of you. Together, we will make a difference.

Thank you and God bless

