

Hon. Benes Z. Aldana (Ret.)



Benes Z. Aldana became the ninth president of The National Judicial College on May 1, 2017. Before joining the NJC, he was on active duty in the U.S. Coast Guard for over 22 years, retiring in the rank of captain and serving as chief trial judge during his last tour of duty. Prior to this assignment, he served as the chief legal officer for the 8th Coast Guard District in New Orleans, Louisiana, overseeing legal advice to Coast Guard operations spanning 26 states and the Gulf of Mexico. He was first appointed a military trial judge in 2005 and as an appellate judge in 2015.

Other notable assignments as a Coast Guard judge advocate included: deputy staff judge advocate, 13th Coast Guard District; trial attorney at the Department of Justice, Environment and Natural Resources Division; legal advisor to the Department of Defense Criminal Investigation Task Force, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; and chief counsel, Legal Engagements Division, U.S. Africa Command in Stuttgart, Germany. He also served as the commanding officer, personnel services and support unit, Seattle, and executive officer for Coast Guard Base Seattle.

He is also a dedicated bar association leader and served as 2009 president of the Asian Bar Association of Washington. Although he grew up in the Seattle area, graduating from Seattle University and University of Washington School of Law, his career has taken him around the world. Among his many other achievements and accomplishments, he served as 2012-2013 chair of the American Bar Association Solo, Small Firm, and General Practice Division, which has approximately 20,000 members and is one of the largest entities in the ABA. He also served in the ABA House of Delegates and on the ABA Rule of Law Initiative Board, ABA Standing Committee on Judicial Independence, ABA Commission on Diversity and Inclusion 360, and as the assembly speaker of the ABA Young Lawyers Division. He recently concluded his service as a member of the ABA Law and National Security Advisory Committee.

His military awards include the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, two Coast Guard Meritorious Service Medals, four Coast Guard Commendation Medals, the Army Commendation Medal, two Coast Guard Achievement Medals, and two Commandant's Letters of Commendation, as well as various team and unit awards. Non-military awards include the DHS General Counsel's Award of Excellence, the NAPABA Daniel Inouye Trailblazer Award, ABAW Judge of the Year, ABA Outstanding Young Military Lawyer Award, NAPABA's "Best Lawyer Under 40," and the American Bar Foundation Fellows Outstanding Chair Award.

President Aldana and his wife, Rowena, have a son, Ehrik, who is a senior at Yale University.