



# Karen Van Essen

PARTNER

Karen represents clients in matters involving anti-corruption compliance, government investigations, and complex commercial disputes.



## Practices

[Business Compliance & Integrity Monitorships](#)  
[Complex Litigation](#)  
[International Trade & Investment](#)  
[Government Enforcement & White Collar](#)  
[International Arbitration & Dispute Resolution](#)  
[Investigations](#)  
[Pro Bono](#)

## International

[Africa](#)  
[Asia](#)  
[China](#)  
[Europe](#)  
[Latin America](#)

## Education

University of Oregon, PhD  
University of Oregon School of Law, JD, Order of the Coif  
University of Oregon, MS  
University of Chicago, MA  
University of Wyoming, BS

## Offices

[Los Angeles](#)

## Phone

[213.443.7625](#)

## Email

[karen.vanessen@afslaw.com](mailto:karen.vanessen@afslaw.com)

Karen has advised clients under investigation by the United States Attorney's Office, the United States Department of Justice, the United States Securities and Exchange Commission, and the California Attorney General's Office, and has worked with foreign counterparts on cross-border government investigations. She also has counseled international companies on their compliance programs and anti-corruption policies and procedures. Karen has litigation experience in state and federal courts and international arbitration proceedings, and she has represented clients in appellate matters before the California Courts of Appeal, the California Supreme Court, and the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth and Federal Circuit. She has worked with clients in a variety of industries, including defense, petroleum, construction, and healthcare.

## Client Work:

- Reviewed, designed, implemented, and tested anti-corruption compliance programs for multinational companies
- Defended clients under investigation by the government in matters related to the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, the False Claims Act, antitrust, securities regulation, and state anti-bribery and anti-corruption laws
- Conducted domestic and cross-border internal investigations related to allegations of corruption and fraud
- Served on an independent consultancy team to assess a global company's compliance with the United States sanctions regime, anti-money laundering laws, and corporate governance.
- Represented clients in matters related to the Arms Export Control Act, anti-dumping and countervailing duties, economic sanctions, and money laundering
- Advised and represented sovereign interests in oil and gas development in international arbitration proceedings
- Counseled international clients on treaty law, including law of the sea, maritime boundaries, and extradition

Defended foreign heads of state and sovereigns on matters related to foreign sovereign immunity

Karen's international work is informed by her extensive experience in studying and analyzing international relations, security studies, and foreign policy. Karen holds a PhD in Political Science and has taught university-level courses related to human rights; ethnic conflict and genocide; international and United Nations peace-keeping missions; war, armed-conflict, and territorial dispute resolution; and nuclear and conventional arms non-proliferation. Given Karen's background in academia, she is sensitive to her international clients' strategic goals and the broader environment in which they make decisions, and offers practical solutions that encompass these interests.

---

## Previous Work

Prior to joining ArentFox Schiff, Karen served as a judicial law clerk to the Honorable Milan D. Smith, Jr. of the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. Before her clerkship at the Ninth Circuit, Karen worked at a law firm in Portland, Oregon, where she handled commercial litigation, including energy and environmental matters.

Upon completing her law degree, Karen served as a judicial law clerk to the Honorable Michael W. Mosman of the United States District Court for the District of Oregon. While in law school, she served as a judicial extern to the Honorable Ann Aiken of the United States District Court for the District of Oregon.

While at the University of Oregon, Karen pursued concurrent law and PhD degrees. Before and during law school, Karen was an instructor and teaching fellow at the University of Oregon Department of Political Science, where she received her doctorate and Master's Degree in that program. Her dissertation, "Opacity in an Era of Transparency: The Politics of De Facto Nuclear Weapons States" focused on the nuclear weapons programs in Israel, India, and Pakistan. For her Master's Degree at the University of Chicago, Karen studied the competing territorial claims in the South China Sea.

---

## Professional Activities

Karen is a member of the American Society of International Law, the American Bar Association's International Law section, and the International Bar Association.

---

## Publications, Presentations & Recognitions

- "Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorist Financing," contributing writer with Alexander Birkhold, et al., *The Year in Review: An Annual Publication of the ABA/Section of International Law*, Vol. No. 52 (2018)
- "United Nations and International Organizations," contributing writer with Elizabeth A. Turchi, et al., *The Year in Review: An Annual Publication of the ABA/Section of International Law*, Vol. No. 51 (2017)
- "False Claims Act and Overlap with International Trade," co-presented at "A Changing Frontier: International Trade Regulations, Compliance, and Enforcement Trends," April 22 & 23, 2015, in Irvine and Redlands, California.
- "Your Skills: Four Keys to Gaining and Holding Credibility," *The Recorder*, June 2013
- Senior Editor, *Oregon Review of International Law*
- Dissertation "Opacity in an Era of Transparency: The Politics of De Facto Nuclear Weapon States"
- Thesis "Confidence Building in Southeast Asia: Opportunities and Risks"

---

## Life Beyond the Law

Karen enjoys traveling, playing tennis, watching college football and hockey, and historically preserving a Victorian brick house built in 1898.

---

## **Bar Admissions**

California

Oregon

Montana

---

## **Court Admissions**

US District Court, District of Oregon

US District Court, Central District of California

US District Court, Eastern District of California

US District Court, Southern District of California

US Court of Appeals, 9th Circuit

US Court of Appeals, Federal Circuit