

## **NJPN Comment in the Catholic Universe - *Henrietta Cullinan*: Toxic masculinity**

*'Mighty Mountain and the three strong women'* is a book I recently read to my grandchildren. A young man on his way to a sumo wrestling competition is taken in by three strong women. They ask him, "but what will you do when you meet someone who is really strong?" Then the women set out to make him the strongest wrestler in Japan.

This story reminds me of the strongman in the Gospel who protects his house and possessions with locks and weapons, until 'he who is stronger' comes along and overpowers him.

Ray Acheson, of 'Reaching Critical Will', the disarmament programme of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, explains how terms associated with masculinity are hugely influential in the context of militarism, armaments and nuclear weapons in particular.

Acheson tells the story of a scientist, in a meeting with other scientists, being told that a certain weapon will cause 'only' 30 million fatalities. He is shocked but he then censors himself for fear of being seen as 'weak'. In this context, nuclear weapons are seen as strong and masculine, with diplomacy and cooperation being seen as feminine and weak. Caring about casualties is seen as weak with the result that certain legitimate concerns are left unsaid.

This culture of 'toxic masculinity,' Acheson believes, prevents states from dismantling nuclear weapons. He feels gender stereotypes that promote the value of weapons of terror, "are a problem at the heart of international relations and national security policies, obstructing progress towards the goal of the majority of states and citizens: the total elimination of the world's nuclear arsenals."

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which came into force in January, is the first treaty written from the victims' point of view. Signatories are under obligation to help those who suffer from nuclear weapons testing and contamination. A recent poll, commissioned by CND, reports that the majority of the public supports the UK government signing up to the Treaty and a majority also supports a ban on nuclear weapons globally. Yet those in government refuse to listen to their voters.

The COVID pandemic has taught us our own vulnerability and interdependency. Humans and nonhumans, land and environment are interconnected. New thinking on security is urgently needed.

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