



## "I am not useless"

*Early one morning, at the age of 10, Rohafza Naderi stepped on a landmine just before entering the gate to the school. Despite her young age, she considered her life already finished. But thanks to a supportive family and a bright father it turned out differently. Rohafza now works in an orthopaedic centre in Kabul and fights for the rights of disabled women.*

Memories from school are not all pleasant for Rohafza Naderi. Because she was handicapped, some of the other children wouldn't talk to her, and others would beat her. She especially remembers the time when she was in the fifth class. "They took my notebook away from me, said I had a dirty face and slapped me." She pauses for a deep breath and continues: "In Afghanistan, it is difficult for the disabled to have a good relationship with other people."

After her accident, she stayed in hospital for a year with wounds so serious that her right leg had to be amputated. With only a pair of crutches she went through two difficult years during which she wasn't able to do much. The artificial leg she got from the orthopaedic centre of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Kabul helped her a lot. But it didn't prevent the bullying at school.

*"I am very happy that my father encouraged me to continue my education. It wouldn't happen in most Afghan families"*

### Struggling with self-depreciation

"One day I decided that I would never go back to school and I went home to tell my father", she remembers. But he did not accept the decision of his daughter. "He said that he would not want me just to hide in a corner of the house. He wanted me to attend school and tried to convince me that I was as good as anybody else. I didn't believe him. I didn't think I could live a normal life," says Rohafza, today 28 years of age.

Her father went to see the school headmaster and that actually helped. The bullying stopped and after a couple of years Rohafza left the school with top marks. She continued on to medical university where she also made the top of her class. Today she works as a physiotherapist at the ICRC orthopaedic centre in Kabul where she was once a patient herself. "Now I know that I am not useless. I was a good student, I have a wonderful life with good colleagues and I am helping other disabled people," she says.

Almost all Afghan members of the ICRC staff at the orthopaedic centres are disabled themselves – most of them former patients. Compared to other disabled women in Afghanistan, Rohafza Naderi considers herself extraordinarily lucky. "I am very happy that my father encouraged me to continue my education. It wouldn't happen in most Afghan families. Disabled women have a very difficult life. They have not been attending



Mine awareness sessions for women are usually carried out at the Afghan Red Crescent Society health centres in the most contaminated areas.



school, they have great difficulties getting married and are just kept in the house and depend completely on their family and its will to look after them”, she says.

### **Rohafza now enjoys her life**

Following many years of sadness, Rohafza Naderi now enjoys her life. Beside the job she follows English classes and attends a computer course. Earlier this year she was selected as an Afghan representative to a conference in Thailand on the civil rights of disabled women – a subject she has ambitions to work more on in the future.

“It is important that people outside Afghanistan know more about the difficulties women with disabilities faces in our country,” she says.

Disabled women face great difficulties in getting married and creating a family of their own. “No one wants a disabled woman. It is much easier for men”, she says. Rohafza herself has remained single until now. She has had one offer from a man who wanted a second wife. “I don’t want to marry someone who has a wife already,” she says, and adds that she is lucky to have a family that respects her choice in this regard as it is the family who will always have the final say.

She finds it very difficult to talk about whether she wants to get married or not. “I hope to find a kind man. But I know it will be difficult”. She lives with her parents in the Afghan capital Kabul sharing a house with her three brothers and three sisters. Asked how she sees her future living conditions in Afghanistan if she doesn’t marry, she smiles and shrugs her shoulders before saying: “God knows better than us.”