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## IMC Helps Restore Water Service to Decimated Southern Lebanon Towns

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By Julie Poucher Harbin

**Braachit, Lebanon**—During last summer's war with Israel, rockets and bombs damaged water towers in six villages in southern Lebanon, disrupting water service to more than 17,000 people. The town of Braachit was particularly hard-hit by the conflict. In addition to the destruction of about one-fifth of the homes there, the town's main water source was damaged, cutting most of the population's water supply in half and forcing people to stretch their budgets to buy extra water for their everyday needs.

A bomb landed in one of the connecting towers in Braachit and blew up, leaving a one-meter cavity and damaging the pipe network. Another tower sustained heavy rocket damage, causing leakage, although it continued to operate; and a third tower serving Braachit and a neighboring town was totally destroyed. To complicate matters, decades-old electrical pumps at Braachit's main pump station suddenly broke down in late March this year.

By this summer, IMC will have helped restore water service to Braachit, as well as to five other towns in south Lebanon. In early April, IMC finished repairing Braachit's connecting water towers and pipe network. It is also facilitating the replacement of the broken pumps, which was funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. "IMC brought these towers back to life from the dead," said Nabih Awali, the municipal South Water Authority water reservoir manager.

Once the new pumps are in place, the towers will provide piped-in water to 6,500 Braachit citizens, out of a population of around 8,000. About 1,700 people still will not have access to the piped in water either because they live at a higher elevation than the towers, or don't have pipes connected to their homes.



PHOTO: Julie Poucher Harbin

These connecting water towers, the primary water source for the village of Braachit, were heavily damaged during last summer's conflict with Israel.

Braachit's economy is 90 percent agricultural, and many of the villagers lost a big chunk of their livelihoods during the conflict last summer. Crops were ruined by lack of water, cluster bombs, and displacement of farmers forced to flee the fighting. Most of the villagers have now returned, and the cluster bombs are slowly being cleared from the fields.

The increased water supply means the people of Braachit will have plenty of potable drinking water. It will also bring much-needed relief for local farmers as the summer season approaches.

"Once water service is restored, farmers in Braachit will be able to plant more so they can earn more money and improve their life," said IMC senior engineer Fouad Naffaa. "The people will be able to take more showers and better protect themselves from bacteria. They will be able to wash their clothes more often. They won't be afraid to run out of water, as they are now."

Mohammad Farhat, father of seven children ranging in age from one and a half to 14 years, supports his wife, children, sister, and parents who are living with him on the \$100 a week he makes in the construction business. Besides

covering everyone's basic needs, he also pays his parents' medical expenses: his father has diabetes, and his mother has a lame arm.

"I don't have much money to buy water," he said, explaining that he has been purchasing expensive water tanks to meet the needs of his family. He said it costs about \$20 to purchase three cubic meters of water, which lasts about one week with conservative use.

Until the new water supply comes in, the family must hope that there is enough rain to water the fields where they grow tomatoes, cucumbers, melons and beans. "Right now, we are just depending on rain," said Farhat's wife Maryam. "Maybe our crops will grow, maybe they won't."

Farhat collects rainwater in a concrete holding tank alongside his house. He managed to gather enough rain water during a late March storm to last one week—but the water stored in these holding tanks is not clean, and therefore unsafe for cooking or



PHOTO: IMC

Braachit's main water towers after rehabilitation by IMC.

drinking.

"Without water it is a horrible life," said Maryam, looking up from the plastic basin where she crouched, washing the family's clothing. "Now we are taking showers only once a week. Once we get more water our lives will improve. If we have water we can clean more clothes. We can plant in our field. Water is life."



PHOTO: Julie Poucher Harbin

Janaa Farhat washes dishes at the home of her brother Mohammad in Braachit. The source of the water coming from the faucet is a tank, placed on the roof, that the family bought to supplement their water needs.



PHOTO: Julie Poucher Harbin

IMC senior engineer Fouad Naffaa inspects the progress of IMC repair work on a water tower hit by rockets in Aatit, a village in southern Lebanon.

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## Press Contact

Stephanie Bowen [sbowen@imcworldwide.org](mailto:sbowen@imcworldwide.org) 310-826-7800

### IMC Headquarters

1919 Santa Monica Blvd. Suite 400, Santa Monica, CA 90404  
T. 310.826.7800 F. 310.442.6622

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