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**Partnership will help stop human traffickers from
preying on vulnerable children after natural disasters**

A portion of the proceeds from award-winning author Shamim Sarif's new novel, "The Athena Protocol", will help non-profit Headwaters Relief Organization educate and protect potential victims, families and community leaders

Areas impacted by natural disaster and devastation are recognized as inevitable sites of increased human trafficking, with children being the most vulnerable. It happens in the U.S. as well as developing countries. Now, Headwaters Relief Organization, an international non-profit disaster relief organization, is teaming with award-winning novelist Shamim Sarif to raise funds to educate communities about these risks, and support those who have experienced trafficking.

"We have encountered trafficking nationally and internationally in our disaster work," comments Headwaters Relief Organization Founder Rebecca Thomley, PsyD, whose organization supports the needs of families and communities after tornadoes, floods, earthquakes, fires and man-made disasters. "The long-term consequences such as hunger, disease and homelessness can be devastating. Economic problems and government's inability to protect in the wake of disaster creates conditions of increased individual vulnerability and criminal activity. Traffickers take advantage of these conditions."

Sarif's novel, "The Athena Protocol", will help fund efforts to stop the exploitation

One of Headwaters' award-winning initiatives is creating children's books as tools for education, as well as for helping victims build coping skills and develop resiliency. That strategy drew the attention of Sarif, an accomplished screenwriter and film director as well as an author, whose stories often encompass social justice. Her new novel, "The Athena Protocol", a young adult thriller which HarperCollins will publish on October 8, 2019, addresses trafficking as a global issue.

In the book, Athena is a top secret, socially conscious, all-female organization that combats injustice against women and children around the world. The protagonist, Jessie, is a young, hot-headed agent embroiled in a daring mission to take down a human trafficking operation in Belgrade.

As with Headwaters, Sarif believes the impact of storytelling is huge. "Stories can be empowering, giving us characters we identify with and a framework to understand our own lives and humanity," she says. "I hope to build awareness amongst young adults who read "The Athena Protocol" and perhaps motivate a desire to make a difference to this global problem."

Sarif will donate 100 percent of the affiliate fees she receives for each book purchased through the links [on her site](#) to Headwaters Relief Organization.

“We are keenly aware of the need to educate potential victims, families and community leaders about the possibility of trafficking and to further support those who have experienced trafficking,” says Thomley. “What excites us about partnering with Shamim Sarif on “The Athena Protocol” is that it promotes our vision for interacting with young people where we believe we can have a lot of impact.”

Human trafficking: Lives are at stake all over the world

The statistics are staggering:

- According to the U.S. government, 600,000 to 800,000 women, children and men are bought and sold across international borders every year and exploited for forced labor or commercial sex.
- When internal trafficking victims are added to the estimates, the number of victims annually is in the range of 2 to 4 million; 50% of those victims are estimated to be children.
- The International Labor Organization estimates that forced labor and human trafficking is a \$150 billion industry worldwide.

“Traffickers often exploit young and desperate orphaned girls by assuring them of a better life. When basics like food and shelter are threatened, the girls have little hope, which makes the trafficker seem like a way out of their isolation and hunger. The girls may be taken away from their homes and brought to larger cities where they are forced into prostitution and subjected to horrible abuse and violence.

“The Athena Protocol” releases on October 8, 2019 and is available now for pre-order. Each book purchased through the links on Sarif’s website will result in a donation to Headwaters Relief Organization. “This is a great opportunity to contribute to an important cause while buying a book that I hope readers will enjoy!” says Sarif.

To order “The Athena Protocol” visit <https://shamimsarif.com/the-athena-protocol/>. To learn more about how Headwaters Relief Organization is trying to prevent human trafficking around the world, visit <https://www.headwatersrelief.org/initiatives/human-trafficking/>.

Media Note: For additional information or to schedule an interview, contact Media Relations Agency at 952-697-5220.

About Headwaters Relief Organization

Headwaters Relief Organization is a non-profit disaster relief collaboration of volunteers that supports the needs of families and communities after disasters. Headwaters provides public health, psychosocial and medical support as well as disaster debris clean up and rebuilding in partnership with other organizations.

Headwaters seeks to inspire passion to serve others. We forget connections between those who are being served, the Headwaters team and the community. We work to ensure that every volunteer, regardless of age, background, skills or experience, feels valued and motivated to

continue to serve others. Our volunteers learn to recognize, respect and value differences. In doing this work, Headwaters' volunteers build stronger communities and a better world for all.

Biography: Dr. Rebecca Thomley

Dr. Rebecca Thomley is the President and Chief Executive Officer of Orion Associates, a management organization providing management services to related and unrelated, for-profit and non-profit companies primarily in the social services field. Dr. Thomley also developed a non-profit, Headwaters Relief Organization, to promote volunteerism and provide disaster relief to communities and those affected by natural disasters.

Biography: Shamim Sarif

Writer and director Shamim Sarif is an award-winning novelist, screenwriter, and film director. Her new book, *The Athena Protocol*, is an all-female contemporary action thriller released by Harper Collins as the first in a series. It is her fourth novel.

Shamim's feature films as writer/director include "Despite the Falling Snow" (Rebecca Ferguson and Charles Dance), "I Can't Think Straight" and "The World Unseen" all based on her own acclaimed books. Her movies have won 47 awards between them.

Shamim has spoken at events worldwide, including TED, INK in India and DLD in Munich. Corporate events have included Deloitte, Goldman Sachs, Citibank and Disney. Shamim is a member of BAFTA and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.