



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP TO "MAKE SENSE OF BELIEFS AND VALUES"

**MacNeil Lehrer Productions, Springer Publishing,
and the International Beliefs and Values Institute at James Madison University
Join Together to Explore the Nature and Impact of Beliefs and Values Around the World**

HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA (March 28, 2008) - How did a small group of individuals come to believe that flying airplanes into buildings and killing thousands of people was a just and spiritually-sanctified act that would result in their own salvation after death? What accounts for the fact that boys are still valued much more highly than girls in so many countries, resulting in female infanticide and other gender-based actions, policies, and practices around the world? Why do different groups of people disagree so strongly about the goodness or truth of particular beliefs and values, such as whether or not the war in Iraq was justified or global warming is real, and what are the implications of such differences? These are just a few of the many belief/value questions that a new video series, academic journal, and international conference will address across the spectrum of historical and current perspectives and global points of view.

Coordinated by the International Beliefs and Values Institute or IBAVI at James Madison University in Virginia (U.S.A) (<http://www.jmu.edu/ibavi>), this multi-pronged project represents the culmination of several years of planning and preparation. As explained by Craig Shealy, Ph.D., Professor and Executive Director of the IBAVI, "The mission of the IBAVI is to understand what beliefs and values are, where they come from, and how they are linked to local and global actions, policies, and practices. It seemed to us that such big and important questions could most credibly be answered by creating multiple venues through which the public, policy makers, scholars, and leaders from around the world could engage in dialogue together regarding these crucial issues that impact us all."

To do so, the IBAVI approached MacNeil Lehrer Productions, a highly regarded Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) production company (<http://www.macneil-lehrer.com/>) in the United States, to ascertain its interest in partnering on a video series project, entitled *Making Sense of Beliefs and Values: A World of Views*, which examines beliefs and values around the world through the contemporary and historic lens of religion, politics, ethnicity, gender, art, war, the environment, and belief/value transformation. "We are delighted to be working on this project with IBAVI," says Les Crystal, President of MacNeil Lehrer Productions. "The topic of faith and values often comes loaded with preconceptions and passionate views. For more than 30 years, in producing the NewsHour on PBS, we have made it our mission to address complex and intricate subjects with depth, nuance, balance and intelligence. We are particularly sensitive to the importance of incorporating multiple view points with civility and respect."

According to Shealy, one of the challenges in addressing the linkage between beliefs and values and actions, policies, and practices around the world is to "create opportunities for academics, policy makers, and leadership of non-governmental organizations to talk together and explore collaborative possibilities. These extraordinary individuals and diverse groups often share similar interests and goals, but differ on the means to achieve what are ultimately common ends. As such, we needed to create dynamic global forums where these constituencies could come together and learn from and contribute to each other's work over the short- and long-term."

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In addition to the video series, another of these forums is an international conference scheduled for 2009 at James Madison University. *Sustainable Visions and Values: Calling the Global Academy to Action* (<http://www.jmu.edu/ibavi/svvconference.pdf>) will bring together international delegates from different backgrounds and experiences in order to review and translate the “visions and values” of recent international conferences into “interdisciplinary programs of inquiry and policy development that are sustainable and relevant to the global academic community, policy makers, and the public at large”

The results of this conference will be published in another forum, a new academic journal from Springer Publishing Company, based in New York (<http://www.springerpub.com/>). The inaugural issue of this new journal—*Beliefs and Values: Understanding the Global Implications of Human Nature*—will feature keynote addresses and commentary by a wide range of distinguished contributors from around the world. Building upon the conference, subsequent issues of *Beliefs and Values* will examine the link between beliefs and values and actions, policies, and practices across a number of thematic areas (e.g., conflict resolution, human and minority rights, sustainability, equal access, global education, religious and cultural understanding).

“Springer has a tradition of producing socially conscious publications,” says James Costello, Director of Journal Publishing at Springer. “We are pleased to launch this academically founded and intellectually stimulating new journal in conjunction with the video series and international conference. The wide distribution of ideas brings the concepts supported by research to policymakers and to the public, precisely those in the best position to implement change. In order to sustain the planet and guarantee a future, it is crucial that we engage in respectful discourse founded upon an understanding of the reasons behind the beliefs and values that we and others hold.”

All of these belief/value projects—the video series, new journal, and international conference—are interrelated in that individuals or programs to be featured in the video series, such as Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne, Founder and President of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka and member of the IBAVI’s Advisory Board (http://www.jmu.edu/ibavi/bios/Ariyaratne_Litt.html), will also participate in the video series, conference, and new journal.

The overarching goal of all of these initiatives is to “understand beliefs and values and their impact on the decisions people make because they underpin how we see the world and each other,” says Dr. Christine Loh, Founder and Chief Executive Office of Civic Exchange in Hong Kong, and member of the IBAVI’s Advisory Board (http://www.jmu.edu/ibavi/bios/christine_loh.html). As Dr. Jo Beall, Professor of Development Studies at the London School of Economics, and another IBAVI Advisory Board member (http://www.jmu.edu/ibavi/bios/jo_beall.html) concludes, “In a world characterized by asymmetries of wealth and power, international cooperation will be better achieved if we can understand and respect each other’s beliefs in the process of achieving shared values.”

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For additional information about this initiative, please contact the International Beliefs and Values Institute at ibavi@jmu.edu or +540-568-6477 or visit <http://www.jmu.edu/ibavi>.

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