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CANADIANS REMAIN UPBEAT ABOUT ECONOMY: SURVEY

But Turmoil in Middle East May Undermine Consumer Confidence

TORONTO, July 19, 2006 – Canadians' assessments about the state of the Canadian economy continue to be bullish, according to a survey concluded last Thursday, just as havoc in the Middle East began.

“No doubt the escalation of conflict in the region with its spillover effects on consumers through higher fuel prices will dampen confidence in the economy,” said Richard Jenkins, vice-president of TNS Canadian Facts and director of the marketing research firm's *Consumer Confidence Index*.

Since TNS Canadian Facts began monthly tracking of consumer confidence in July 2004, the overall picture has never been so positive. The *Present Situation Index*, which captures evaluations of the overall state of the economy and the employment situation, now stands at 117.9, a slight rise from 116.6 in June but continuing a long-term trend of improving evaluations.

The *Expectations Index*, which measures consumers' estimation of the economy, household income and employment six months from now, also rose marginally and is now 104.6, up from 104.1 the previous month. This figure also represents the highest level of optimism about the future economy since the index was created two years ago.

The one area of continued, relative weakness, is the *Buy Index*, which gauges the degree to which people think the current period is a good time to make major purchases. The *Index* now sits at 95.4, up 1.3 points since last month, but it remains well below the value for July of last year (104.7). Rising interest rates over this same period appear to have dampened consumers' enthusiasm about making major purchases, given the increasing cost of borrowing.

Consumer Confidence Index tracks Canadians' attitudes about the economy each month and is part of a global study conducted by TNS in 18 countries. Three indices are produced each month to show how confidence in the economy is changing: *Present Situation Index*; an *Expectations Index*; and a *Buy Index*. The Canadian fieldwork is conducted using the firm's national bi-weekly telephone omnibus service, TNS Express Telephone. A total of 1,015 nationally representative Canadian adults were interviewed between July 10 and 13. The survey results are considered accurate to 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

TNS Canadian Facts (www.tns-cf.com) is one of Canada's most prestigious full-service marketing, opinion and social research organizations.

About TNS

TNS is a market information group:

- The world's largest provider of custom research and analysis
- A leader in political and social polling
- A major supplier of consumer panel, media intelligence and TV and radio audience measurement services.

TNS operates across a global network in over 70 countries, allowing us to provide internationally consistent, up-to-the-minute and high quality information and analysis.

The group's employees deliver innovative thinking and excellent service to local and multi-national clients worldwide. In the custom business, they combine in-depth sector knowledge with expertise in the areas of new product development, positioning and segmentation research, brand and advertising research and stakeholder management.

TNS' strategic goal is to be recognized as the global leader in delivering value added information and insights that help our clients to make more effective decisions.

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