

NPC hopefuls vow to seek parole for journalist

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Prospective Hong Kong deputies to the National People's Congress have vowed to fight for medical parole for jailed local journalist Ching Cheong.

The pledges, offered at an election forum last night, were welcomed by Ching's wife, Mary Lau Man-ye, who said she hoped they would be carried out and that Beijing would heed them.

Candidates at the forum, held by the pan-democratic group the **Professional Commons**, were asked if they would take any action to help Ching, who is serving five years for spying for Taiwan.

I will fight for medical parole for him as soon as possible, NPC candidate and legislative councillor Choy So-yuk, of the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong, said, citing her friendship with the veteran journalist since university.

But Ms Choy said it was important to respect the independence of the mainland judiciary while trying to assist Ching, adding she had been pondering whether a high-profile or a low-profile approach would be best.

On the other side of the political fence, pan-democratic contender Chong Chan-yau, of the Civic Party, made the same pledge.

He has suffered too much, Mr Chong said. He at least should get medical parole and unification with his family.

Three incumbent deputies seeking re-election, Maria Tam Wai-chu, Ma Fung-kwok and Yeung Yiu-chung, said they had taken action to help the journalist during their current terms, including writing letters to mainland authorities.

Lau, also a journalist, said she was very grateful to the candidates who had offered help.

I really thank them. They are figures representing various sectors of society and I hope Beijing will hear their message, she said. I also hope they will realise their pledge if they

get elected.

Two first-time contestants, former KCRC chairman Michael Tien Puk-sun and Executive Councillor Bernard Chan said they did not have sufficient information to judge whether Ching needed medical parole. But Mr Tien promised to follow the case if elected and Mr Chan said he could reflect the concerns about it.

The televised forum, to which all 50 candidates had been invited, was attended by 20. Two closed-door meetings between contestants and electors were also held by the Heung Yee Kuk and DAB yesterday, each with more than 30 candidates.