

Ruth: We must reach out to win

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The Scottish Conservatives need to field candidates from the country's diverse backgrounds, communities and faiths if they are to become the next government of Scotland, Ruth Davidson will say.

She is due to make the comments at an event in Glasgow this evening to mark the Muslim festival of Eid al-Adha.

She will tell the gathering that, for too long, the Scottish Conservatives haven't "looked or sounded enough like the Scotland we seek to represent."

She will say that, ahead of the 2021 elections, the party would now seek to promote and elect candidates from every part of Scotland – including the Muslim community.

Ruth will be addressing the European Conservative and Reformists Group Eid al-Adha Dinner in Glasgow.

Ruth will say:

"As Muslims mark Eid al-Adha across the world, it is important we recognise and celebrate the contribution of the Muslim community here at home. Scotland is a far richer nation, both socially and culturally, because of the work you do, the faith you show, the charity you give and the leadership you bring across Scotland's towns and cities.

"And, at a time when the politics of identity is rearing its head across the globe, it is important that we celebrate the diversity and integration of Scotland – something we want to see enhanced and deepened. We cannot allow for prejudice or hate to sow false division between our faith communities.

"And it would be wrong to think we in Scotland are immune from such attacks – whether that is the disgraceful incident of the Catholic priest spat upon during an Orange Walk in Glasgow's East End last month or the on-going examples of anti-Semitic and Islamophobic hate speech we see across the internet and in public discourse on a near-weekly basis.

"The right to religious expression is a foundation stone not just of the United Kingdom, but of all advanced societies. And that freedom must apply to everyone equally.

"So when Muslims feel inhibited in the expression of their faith due to harassment or hostility, it isn't just a problem for your faith, it is an insult to people of all faiths and none, and an affront to the British values that we share, too. And those of us who believe in those values have a duty to act.

"I have said this before over the last year, and I repeat it tonight. Political parties must play their part in this. And, while that part requires us to speak out, it needs more than simply words – it needs actions too.

"Politics only works if the whole country is represented. And, for too long, my party hasn't looked or sounded enough like the Scotland we seek to represent.

"It is not enough to have representatives speaking on behalf of communities of place, of purpose or of faith – we need to have representatives who are from those communities too.

"I'm incredibly proud that Nosheena Mobarik is currently serving as our Scottish MEP in Brussels – the first female Muslim returned to any of Scotland's elected parliaments, and I thank her again this evening for her tireless work both here and in Brussels too.

"But with that post ending when we leave the European Union next year – when Nosheena will return to the House of Lords – we simply must ensure that when we next face the electorate, they see Conservative faces that reflect all Scotland's richness.

"The talent and leadership we see in Scotland's Muslim community – in business, in the professions, in community action – is an enormous resource, and I want to see more of it in parliament, too.

"This is a non party-political gathering, so I speak to everyone when I say, if you feel you have something to give, a commitment to make or a cause to champion, please consider standing as a candidate – we need more voices from more communities at every level of Scottish politics.

"And, if I could be allowed to make a direct plea as the leader of my party – the Scottish Conservative and Unionist party – we want to hear from you. We are working hard over the next few years to build up the number of candidates across the country ahead of the 2021 Scottish election.

"If I am to be the next First Minister of Scotland, we need to fill the Holyrood benches with the brightest talent and greatest experience we can find, support, promote and elect from every community in this country. That includes the Muslim community.

"If you want Scotland to remain part of the United Kingdom and if you want to build a stronger Scotland for all – where we champion this country's entrepreneurial spirit and strive for excellence in our schools – that makes you a Scottish Conservative.

"And if you believe in those values, I ask that you join us – because you will find a home with us."