

I have announced my intention to stand down as SNP Leader at the Party's Annual Conference in November and then as First Minister when the SNP have elected the next Leader following a membership ballot.

My statement to the nation, made a few moments ago at Bute House, is as follows:

"I am immensely proud of the campaign which Yes Scotland fought and of the 1.6 million voters who rallied to that cause by backing an independent Scotland.

"I am also proud of the 85 per cent turnout in the referendum and the remarkable response of all of the people of Scotland who participated in this great constitutional debate and the manner in which they conducted themselves.

"We now have the opportunity to hold Westminster's feet to the fire on the "vow" that they have made to devolve further meaningful power to Scotland. This places Scotland in a very strong position.

"I spoke to the Prime Minister today and, although he reiterated his intention to proceed as he has outlined, he would not commit to a second reading vote by 27th March on a Scotland Bill. That was a clear promise laid out by Gordon Brown during the campaign. The Prime Minister says such a vote would be meaningless. I suspect he cannot guarantee the support of his party.

"But today the point is this. The real guardians of progress are not the politicians at Westminster, or even at Holyrood, but the energised activism of tens of thousands of people who I predict will refuse meekly to go back into the political shadows.

"For me right now, therefore there is a decision as to who is best placed to lead this process forward politically.

"I believe that in this new exciting situation, redolent with possibility, Party, Parliament and country would benefit from new leadership.

"Therefore I have told the National Secretary of the SNP that I will not accept nomination to be a candidate for leader at the Annual Conference in Perth on 13th-15th November.

"After the membership ballot I will stand down as First Minister to allow the new leader to be elected by due Parliamentary process.

"Until then I will continue to serve as First Minister. After that I will continue to offer to serve as Member of the Scottish Parliament for Aberdeenshire East.

"It has been the privilege of my life to serve Scotland as First Minister. But as I said often during the referendum campaign this is not about me or the SNP. It is much more important than that.

"The position is this. We lost the referendum vote but can still carry the political initiative. More importantly Scotland can still emerge as the real winner."

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Alex Salmond". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping flourish at the end.