Hi everyone. I'm Hugo Larochelle and it's in my role of General Chair that I'm happy to welcome you to the NeurIPS 2020 conference!

This year is a unique time for the conference. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, much like many other conferences in the field, we decided to hold this year's meeting entirely online. A record number of over 20,000 registered attendees will be participating in this year's event, compared to roughly 13,000 people last year.

The conference generally consists of 4 elements.

The first is the main conference program, which my colleague Marc'Aurelio will tell you more about in a few minutes. He is Program Chair for NeurIPS 2020.

The second are the adjacent scientific events to the conference, such as the tutorials, workshops, demonstrations and competitions. Notably, we've drastically increased the number of tutorials, from 9 to 16, to cover as much of the 24-hour cycle for attendees around the world and also provide a valuable resource to new members of our community. Also, the Workshop Chairs have made a place for a special COVID-19 Symposium, to give a dedicated space for our researchers who are contributing to our society's fight against the virus.

The third are community-building events, such as socials, meetups and the NewInML workshop. These events were introduced last year and were well appreciated. Meetups differ from socials in that they are meant to be available to anyone in the larger ML community and don't require registration. The pre-recorded conference keynotes, orals, spotlights and tutorials are made available freely to all, and are potential material for these meetups. Additionally, we've continued to work with our affinity group partners such as Black in AI, Indigenous In AI, LatinX, Muslims in ML, Queer in AI, WiML, who are each organizing dedicated workshops to feature the great scientific work from their communities.

The fourth element of the conference is the EXPO day, meant as an opportunity to bridge academia and industry, where sponsors can present their own technological and scientific work. Notably, this year, we extended the EXPO day to also accept contributions from not-for-profit organizations. I would be remiss if I didn't thank our sponsors for making our meeting possible. Attendees will have an opportunity to interact directly with them in our virtual sponsor hall.

Perhaps the most noticeable difference this year will be the virtual nature of the meeting. We built on the experience and lessons learned from our sister conferences ICML and ICLR to bring you what we think will be an exciting experience. In particular, we've recruited two Online Experience Chairs, Y-Lan Boureau and Hendrik Strobelt, to support this effort.

Much like other virtual conferences, presentations, panel discussions and Q&As will be held over video connections. Most presentations have been pre-recorded, to avoid as much as possible technical difficulties and also allow for any attendee to watch these presentations at

the time of their choosing. A centralized chat server based on RocketChat is also in place, to allow for live and deferred interactions between presenters and attendees. The tools used have been selected for their broad usability across the world, and for the first time we've worked with all affinity groups to offer data grants, funding the necessary internet access to participate in the conference.

A key innovation of the NeurIPS online experience is in our partnership with GatherTown. They provide a 2D video-calling spatial environment that we will be using to host the poster sessions of the main conference program. With their combination of technical content and informal interaction, poster sessions have been a challenging component of conferences to bring to the virtual world. But, we hope our efforts in GatherTown will be a significant step towards a more engaging experience, which better replicates both the feeling of navigating from poster to poster, as well as the random hallway encounters we've been missing so much.

With that, I'll leave the floor to Marc'Aurelio Ranzeto, research scientist at Facebook AI Research and Program Chair for NeurIPS 2020.